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# Quarterly Series

FORTY-FIFTH VOLUME

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*THE LIFE OF OUR LIFE*



ROEHAMPTON  
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# THE LIFE OF OUR LORD

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## PART THE SECOND

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### *THE PUBLIC LIFE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST*

#### VII.

#### *The Training of the Apostles*

(PART III.)



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# *THE TRAINING OF THE APOSTLES*

(PART III.)

BY

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS



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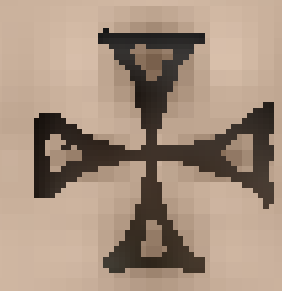
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DOMINE

LIBERA ANIMAM MEAM A LABIIS INIQUIS

ET A LINGUA DOLOSA

QUID DETUR TIBI

AUT QUID APPONATUR TIBI

AD LINGUAM DOLOSAM

SAGITTÆ POTENTIS ACUTÆ

CUM CARBONIBUS DESOLATORIIS

*(Psalm cxix.)*







## PREFACE

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THE portion of the Public Life of our Lord, which is contained in the present volume, has a character of its own, and deserves to be treated apart. It is, in truth, the period of the rise and growth of a great calumny, which had more influence, both on our Lord's own movements and on the ultimate issues of His preaching in the eyes of the world, than may commonly be supposed. It drove Him, continually more and more, away from the places where He had most frequently preached, it forced Him to adopt a greater reserve in His teaching and in the performance even of His miracles of mercy, and it cannot be doubted that it alienated the hearts of a large part of the common people from Him, and that part, in some respects, the most naturally inclined to receive Him, because the most religiously and devoutly disposed. During the preceding period of His preaching He had been met with scant and grudging welcome by the religious authorities of the nation, and at last this reserve and coldness on their part was changed into open opposition and persecution, which made it dangerous for Him to trust Himself, for any length of time together, in places where they could easily have seized His



Person, especially after the Pharisees had allied themselves with the officers of the government of the Tetrarch Herod against Him. But, up to the time of the present portion of His life, there had been no blasphemous attack on His mission by means of the evil tongue. He had been found fault with, for working miracles on the Sabbath day, but that did not imply that they were false miracles, or that they were worked by means of collusion with Satan. This is the form which was taken by the opposition to our Lord at the time at which this volume opens, and we find, at its very close, that the calumny was repeated again and again, so that it became a kind of stock answer on the part of those who represented the religious authorities of Judaism—‘He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.’

Our Lord may have had many reasons for the course of action which He took about this time, in withdrawing almost entirely from the public eye, and passing rapidly, as we shall find in the next volume, from place to place, keeping very much on the extreme borders of the Holy Land, and shunning, except on a very few occasions, the favoured city of Capharnaum itself. But we cannot doubt that this reason was prominent among those which induced Him so to act—the reason of avoiding every opportunity when the repetition of this calumny might be suggested by His presence to the bitter enemies who now haunted His movements, in order if possible to give the slander time to die out of the minds of the people and to save His enemies themselves from this



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continual blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Our Lord did not indeed simply retire from before His enemies. He was all this time most actively engaged in training His Apostles, not only as to this particular point, in the manner in which they and those who were to come after them should meet the diabolical calumnies to which the Church was to be exposed in all ages and in all places, but also in all the principles of their Sacred Ministry. The present volume contains a most important body of this instruction in the first great series of parables. It has been necessary to dwell at considerable length on this precious deposit, preserved to the Church chiefly by St. Matthew. The first Gospel, as has been said in the course of this work, is pre-eminently the Gospel of the Christian teacher, the Scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven. Nowhere has St. Matthew laid us under greater obligations, than in the series of these first parables as he has preserved them for us in their completeness, with the single exception of one most striking parable, which St. Mark has added to the list. This is the chief doctrinal treasure of that part of the Gospels which is dealt with in the present volume—a treasure which it is more easy to point to than to illustrate as it deserves. These eight parables form a sort of manual for all, but most especially for the teachers and preachers of the Word of God, and in this respect they have an importance altogether singular, which may be compared, in its own way, to that of the Sermon on the Mount or the counsels of perfection.



The miracles of this period are comparatively few. This only means that few are recorded, the Evangelists being occupied in relating the incidents which are more peculiar to the time of which they are speaking. It cannot be doubted that, wherever our Lord went in the course of His preaching, He marked His way by these prodigies of charity and compassion. This is obvious, when we consider that, by a kind of accident—though nothing in the arrangement of the Gospels is really accidental—we have in the last chapters of this volume the history of a few successive hours, and these are full of miracles of the first class,—the stilling of the storm on the Lake, the casting out of the legion of devils, the cure of the woman with an issue of blood, the raising to life of the daughter of Jairus, followed by the cure of two blind men, and the casting out of the devil from one who was also dumb. All these things happened within a period of twenty-four hours, of which we have the complete account in the Gospels. And these were miracles, in many cases, worked almost against our Lord's will, that is, which were to some extent forced upon Him by the circumstances of the time.

As this volume presents a contrast, in the sense already pointed out, to its immediate predecessor, so also will there be a similar contrast between this and that which is to follow. Our Lord did not let Himself be overcome by the evil tongues which were so ready to set afloat slanders against Him, slanders which at the same time had the still more dreadful character of being blasphemies against the Holy Ghost. The months



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which succeeded to this portion of the second year of His preaching, although they were spent mostly away from Capharnaum, and even on the very confines of the Holy Land, were marked by some of His most signal miracles, and also by the very bold step which He took in sending forth His Apostles to preach in His Name. Indeed, after the departure from Capharnaum, which immediately followed on the last miracle recorded in this volume, we find our Lord making, as we should say, a fresh start in His activity, and filling the whole land more than ever with the fame of His teaching and of His wonderful works. This continued up to the time of the great Confession of St. Peter, after which our Lord again changed His method, and even the scene of His preaching. Of this we shall have to speak in the following volume of this series.

H. J. C.

*111, Mount Street.*

*Feast of St. Joseph, 1884.*







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## CHAPTER I.

### *The Blind and Dumb Demoniac.*

St. Matt. xii. 22—30; St. Mark iii. 22—27; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 56.

THE words of St. Luke in the passage in which he mentions the attendance on our Lord and His followers of that band of holy women, of whom Magdalene appears to have been the chief, lead us to suppose that the circuit of Galilee, on which He was now engaged, was one of considerable importance and duration. It probably filled up the months of the later autumn, until near the seed-time at the very commencement of winter. But St. Luke and his brother Evangelists are silent about the details of this remarkable period, and we can only answer the question as to the cause of their silence by the remark which has already been made more than once, namely, that the periods of our Lord's life which were spent in this kind of continual activity were just those in which the incidents were probably characterized by the greatest sameness, in which the account of what passed on one day was very probably the account also of what took place on the next day, the only difference being in the minor details of the changes among the persons who were assisted by the working of miracles, or the varieties which might exist among the inhabitants of the towns or villages among which the work of this time was mostly spent. When we come to examine closely the incidents which have been preserved to us in the Public Life, we find that there is almost always

some reason discernible for the mention of the miracles or discourses which are selected by the Evangelists. The days were days of hard work, and the nights were spent by our Lord in prayer. The teaching was the same that had already been delivered in one place after another, and the kind of persons who presented themselves to our Lord for instruction, or with their objections to be solved, were very similar day after day. We have one reason for thinking that the miracles and displays of Divine charity on the part of our Lord at this time were very splendid, but it is a reason which must, if it existed, have been a cause of great pain to His Sacred Heart. It is probable that any great magnificence in the miraculous evidences of our Lord's missions was answered to by a proportionate success in His preaching and in the conversion of souls, and we gather the success of the preaching of this period from the mournful but significant fact that, either during the circuit or at its close, the malice of His enemies had been stimulated to an outrageous pitch, and their hostility to Him blown, so to say, to a white heat. Such is too frequently the issue, in the hearts of those opposed to the teaching of the Church, of the most successful exertions of her preachers, or the most laborious devotion of her missionaries.

We have heard but little of the practical issue of the league formed, some months before this time, between the Pharisees and Scribes from Jerusalem, and the officials charged with the administration of the Tetrarch Herod. This understanding determined our Lord to retire, for a time at least, from the usual scenes of His public preaching during the past year, and to confine His missionary labours to the country parts of the very populous province over which the Tetrarch bore sway. It is natural to conjecture, from the anxiety evinced by our



Lord's nearest relations for His safety, on the occasion of His short visit to Capharnaum, when the Centurion obtained from Him the healing of his servant, that it was dangerous for Him to show Himself in the greater cities, at least where He was most commonly known. We do not hear, at this time, of any danger in the more retired parts of the country, and it is very likely that our Lord changed His scene of action frequently, and that the most violent and bitter of His enemies were to be found rather among the Scribes from the capital than among those whose duties kept them in the country parts. It is natural to think that where He was most known there could be least hostility to Him, and, on the other hand, the emissaries from Jerusalem could hardly set themselves the task of following Him about from place to place, especially as, wherever they so followed Him, they would find Him in the midst of large and enthusiastic multitudes. Under such circumstances, they could do but little by their presence to check His influence directly, and there might have been some apprehensions on their own part as to the safety of such a course. All through the Gospel history we can observe the fear of the people as a powerful influence in the minds of the rulers, whether ecclesiastical or secular. The populations over which they presided were turbulent, violent, and excitable, and they had not only to deal with the populations, but with the Imperial power of Rome, always ready to find fault with and to punish its subordinates on account of disturbances among the people, though not so much on account of its regard for the people as of its dislike of anything that might ruffle the peace of its enormous dominions.

But, if our Lord was thus safe from any attempts on His Person or Life, for the present, this security only turned the malice of His enemies into a fresh channel.

If they could not lay hands on Him, they could do far worse by slander and misrepresentation. And, indeed, the magnificence of His miracles, and the cogency of the argument which was naturally drawn from them in favour of the Divinity of His Mission, forced on the Scribes and Pharisees their last resource of calumny, as the only means left in their power of impairing His influence over the multitudes. They used it, probably, not without an immense effect on the minds of many, and thus it is that the chief notes which remain to us, in illustration of the incidents of the period before us, are such as relate to the extremely captious and malignant opposition to which He was now subjected. The device to which they were driven is one of which we have constant instances in the history of the Church, whose enemies, like those of our Lord, are fain to calumniate the plain workings of God's Holy Spirit, rather than allow the truth of the claims to which those workings witness. This new phase in the opposition to our Lord marks a fresh epoch in the persecution to which He was exposed, and had a very important influence on His line of conduct. It seems probable that the incidents of which we are now to speak took place at the end of this circuit of missionary teaching, that is, while our Lord was returning to Capharnaum, where His Blessed Mother seems to have been. It was there that His bitterest enemies also were awaiting Him.

‘Then was offered to Him one that was possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that he spake and saw, and all the multitude were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David? And the Pharisees hearing it said, This man casteth not out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of devils.’ St. Mark tells us that the Pharisees who said this were ‘the Scribes who were come down from Jerusalem,’ in distinction



from the Scribes and Elders of the towns of Galilee, and that they added to their calumny the still more wicked circumstance, that our Lord Himself had a devil, and this devil Beelzebub, the prince of devils. Here then for the first time we meet this extreme instance of the malice of these miserable men. Our Lord 'was going about doing good,' as St. Peter said of Him after the Day of Pentecost, 'and healing all that were oppressed of the devil,'<sup>1</sup> showing by His works of mercy and power that God was with Him. This was the truth which these men never would acknowledge, and, as they were the teachers of the people, and saw the multitude led on by the evidences with which the Providence of the Eternal Father authenticated the mission of the Incarnate Son, they were bound, both by their office and by their own interests, to find some reasonable explanation of these great miracles, if they would not submit to that one true conclusion, which simple and humble men were thankfully drawing from them. 'Is not this the Son of David?' that is, 'is not this the promised Messiah?' The fact could not be denied, that the diseases and corporal afflictions of men were healed by His touch and by His word, and even, what was more wonderful, and what showed a power which could not but be Divine, the very devils obeyed His word, and left the poor victims of whom they had been permitted to take possession. This was a greater exercise of power than the simple healing of disease, inasmuch as the spiritual kingdom, to which the devils belong, is higher than the natural and physical kingdom, to which belong the bodies of men, and consequently health and disease, and, inasmuch as the devils were not only the enemies of the bodies but also, and principally, of the souls of men. The power which our Lord showed over them, in

<sup>1</sup> Acts x. 38.

the case of dispossession, was an earnest of the deliverance through Him of the souls of men from the tyranny which the devils constantly exercised over them, the truest and most terrible of slaveries, the evil which led on to the eternal miseries which are the punishment of sin, and which do not end with this life.

This was the great boon of which Zachary, the father of St. John, said so much in his Canticle of thanksgiving. 'Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us. That being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and justice before Him all our days.' Never was our Lord so compassionate and so merciful as in these miracles of power over the enemies of mankind. Those who were thus delivered were the choicest instances of His condescension and love. One of them had been the blessed Mary herself, of whom we have been speaking in the last chapter. For many reasons, therefore, the people had the best of grounds for their rejoicing question, 'Is not this the Son of David?' especially when the two kinds of power were united in one miracle, as in the case before us, when the poor victim of demoniac possession was also set free, and at the same moment, from the bodily infirmity which shut him out from the whole worlds of sight and of speech. Later on in the history we find the people exclaiming in wonder and joy when our Lord worked the double miracle in the coasts of Decapolis, 'He hath done all things well, He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.'<sup>2</sup> And now the miracle was threefold, and the senses which were restored to the man delivered from the power of the devil were not those two which are usually kindred, of speech and hearing, but those of seeing and speaking, the cure of which is not so usually concomittant.

<sup>2</sup> St. Mark vii. 37.



And yet, in the midst of these displays of mercy and power, there were to be voices raised against the beneficent and gracious Lord Who bestowed these boons so lovingly, and yet only as a proof and an earnest that He had far higher boons to give. The voices were not those of the poor and ignorant, of gross sinners wallowing in the mire of corruption, not of the unbelieving courtiers of the Herodian princes, or of the heathen population mixed up in so large a proportion with the Jews in some parts of Galilee. They were the voices of learned Scribes of the Law, of ministers of the altar, of ecclesiastics deputed by the central authorities of the holy nation, to watch the proceedings and, if possible, to thwart the growing influence of the Teacher on Whose death they were already determined. Thus the calumny, black in itself, derived additional malignity from the persons who set it in circulation. It is wicked enough to oppose the work of God in any way, and when miracles and other effects which proceed from Him are calumniated, even by simple denial of their supernatural character, the guilt cannot but be great, for to spread abroad such falsehoods is to set ourselves against the designs of God for the salvation of mankind, it is to take part with the very devils themselves in attempting to frustrate the action of God for the benefit of His creatures and for the advancement of His own glory. Lies are always the weapons of the enemies of God, but a lie of this kind has a peculiarly diabolical character. This was a lie which affected, not some point of truth only, as when heretics teach some falsehood against the Catholic creed, or as when the personal character of some servant of God is aspersed, but it affected the evidence of the Kingdom, the appointed means which God had chosen for the proof of the true character of the mission which came from Him. Moreover, it is a peculiarly black

charge to make against any one, that he has dealings with Satan, a charge which transcends in enormity a charge against virtue or honesty, in the common sense of the words. And this charge was now made against our Lord by persons who were designed in His Providence to be the assistants, and not the opponents, of His teaching. They were sitting to a great extent in the seat of authority, and on their attitude towards Him depended, in great measure, the attitude of the whole nation, the salvation of which was at stake in the issue of their reception of Him. Altogether, the calumny of which we now have the first instance, was one of the very blackest of the crimes of these rulers of the holy people, and it drew down on them a very severe admonition from our Blessed Lord.

It would seem that this calumny had not been uttered in His presence, and that He took some measure for securing the attendance of those who made it on the teaching which He now determined to deliver on the subject. St. Matthew says, in His concise way, 'Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them.' St. Mark, filling up the picture with details, from the faithful memory of St. Peter, who was present, says, 'And after He had called them together, He said to them in parables,' and the rest. It was, therefore, a solemn occasion, which He had provided, for the severe warning He was about to address to them. 'How can Satan cast out Satan?' This is the thought that was in their hearts at the time, but which they had uttered and spread abroad before. 'And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan be risen up against himself, he is divided, and cannot stand, but hath an end.' The report in St. Matthew is, as usual, more concise and summary, giving the sense of what our



Lord said in a few words. 'Every kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how then shall his kingdom stand?'

It is clear then that our Lord began, as was His wont, with quietly reasoning with them on the foolishness of their supposition. Satan cannot be supposed to be so foolish as to fight against himself. He is a being of malice, of knowledge, and of skill, infinitely surpassing the knowledge and skill of any human intelligence, and you are making him out to be a child. Even in human polities people know the paramount importance of union in the members of those polities, and that the common interests cannot but be destroyed if citizens of the same commonwealth fight against each other. So it is in families and houses also. Union is strength, discord is weakness and leads to ruin. The policy which you are supposing Satan to be pursuing, is one which must certainly lead immediately to the destruction of his kingdom. 'He is divided and cannot stand, but hath an end.' The argument rests on the common sense of mankind. To make Satan at war with himself, is to make him foolish and remiss, in his warfare against God and His creatures. It is not to be questioned that the kingdom of Satan, in which it appears from Holy Scripture that there are various orders among the fallen spirits, who retain in their misery the ranks which they respectively occupied in Heaven before their sin, is a kingdom of mutual hatred and discord, as indeed must be the case, where every one is filled with pride, rage, disappointment, and despair. Perhaps it is a proof of the intensity of their hatred for God and for the race of mankind, which He has destined to occupy the places from which the evil spirits have fallen, that they can

combine into what seems so like a disciplined army in their assaults on the souls of men. But it appears certain that there is a kind of tyrannical and hateful authority among them, and that the lower orders of these fallen foes of God are subordinate to the higher, and that all are under the supreme dominion of Satan. This being the case, the argument of our Lord has its full force. The warfare between Him and the enemy of God and man was internecine, and without truce. Satan was to do his worst, and for a moment he was to seem to gain the victory, for he was to bring about the plot of Caiaphas, the betrayal of Judas, the pusillanimity of Pilate, the final catastrophe of the Cross. He was to have his hour, when the power of darkness was to be supreme. But that hour was to be the end and overthrow of his kingdom. For he was to bring about therein the salvation of the world, and to be despoiled most justly of the power which he had been allowed to exercise over mankind, because he had ventured to exercise it over the Incarnate Son of God. He was to be caught in his own snare, and destroyed by his own device. And the warfare against him and his evil angels, on the part of our Lord, was to know no interval of repose, and thus to imagine that there could be any compact between them, as may be the case with false teachers and will be the case with Antichrist, was to indulge in a dream which could have no foundation in the elementary conditions of the government of the world by God and of the Dispensation of the Incarnation. Our Lord would never even allow the evil spirits to bear witness to Him, He would not accept testimony to the truth concerning His person or mission, from them. The calumny of the Scribes from Jerusalem, therefore was an evidence of their deep ignorance as to the malice of the devil, and the rules of God's government of the world.



This argument of our Lord, then, was a calm appeal to their reason. He went on with another argument, which is related by St. Matthew, but naturally omitted by St. Mark. This argument is drawn from the practice of exorcism, which was a part of the system of the Jews. In every religious system which is founded on the worship of the true God, there must of necessity be some means of dealing with the evil spirits, the enemies of God and of man, who are allowed by God, in His great wisdom, to tempt and molest men in various degrees and ways, always under His own control, and with due regard to the weakness of the beings whom they assail. For it is for His glory that His enemies should be conquered, in His strength, by beings weaker than themselves. In all such systems, therefore, in which the truth of the existence and of the molesting power of the evil spirits is recognized, there are also some persons to whom power is imparted, by the use of certain rites and holy ordinances, to dispossess the devils of the bodies of men whose control they have been allowed for a time to usurp. This system of exorcisms and exorcists existed among the Jews, and it was a recognized thing among them that devils could be cast out, under certain circumstances, and by certain people, nor were these ministers always the highest in the hierarchical grades of the Old Covenant, any more than in the system of the Catholic Church. Our Lord now calmly appeals to the existence of this system among the Jews, as a proof of the injustice and malignity of His enemies. The charge which they had made against Him, might with equal justice have been made against any exorcist whatever, and yet it was made against Him alone. ‘And if I, by Beelzebub, cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges.’ This form of language is like that which our Lord uses a little later

on, when He speaks of the Queen of the South, and of the men of Ninive, as rising up in judgment against the men of that generation and condemning them, that is, as showing by their own example how inexcusable the Jews of His time were. In the same way these Jewish exorcists would be the condemnation of those of their own Scribes and teachers who brought this calumnious charge against our Lord, that He was in league with the devils and so cast them out, because their own instance would show that they did not deny the power of exorcism in the Kingdom of God, and that therefore they were inconsistent in their malignity in making their accusation against Him. If they saw an exorcist of their own casting out a devil they would say that he did it by the power of God, but if they saw our Lord doing the same work of mercy, they said He did it by the power of the evil one himself. Why was this? It was only because of the malice of their own hearts, which made it a necessity for them to decry Him and discredit His miracles in every possible way, because they were beforehand determined not to acknowledge His Divine mission.

Our Lord goes on to set forth the true import of this exercise by Him of His power over the devils. It was for the sake of escaping this inevitable conclusion, which they had made up their minds never to accept, that they had taken refuge in the foulest and most blasphemous calumnies. Nevertheless the conclusion was there, and they could not deny its cogency. ‘But if I, by the finger of God, the Spirit of God, cast out devils, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you.’ The fact of His power over the devils could not be set aside, and like the other evidences which the Providence of His Father ordained for the authentication of His mission, it had its clear irresistible importance. It was no power like that committed to the exorcists, who by certain prayers and



invocations were allowed to cast out devils in certain cases. Our Lord always spoke and acted with sovereign authority, in His own Name, and without the rites of preparation and invocation which were to be used by others, which showed that they possessed only a delegated power. He cast out devils in the Spirit of God, and in His own Name. This proved, beyond all cavil, the truth that the Kingdom of God was now come. For this was one of the works of the Kingdom, which it belonged to the Holy Ghost to carry out and organize, first through the Sacred Humanity of our Lord Himself, and afterwards in the Church, which He was to leave behind Him for the continuance of His work for the benefit of mankind. The existence of this power in the Church has always been one of the evidences of her Divine mission, and its exercise by our Lord was another proof, added to many more, that He was sent to them by God. The word used by our Lord for the coming upon them of the Kingdom, is the word which signifies a sudden unexpected arrival, as of a great blessing, or a great calamity, which bursts on people unawares. They knew the Kingdom of God was to come, and they could tell many of the signs of its coming, but when it came, it caught them unprepared and inclined, by the corruption of their hearts, to disbelieve its arrival. So it so constantly is with the great dealings of God with man, especially with the presence of His Church. People are always wishing for something which is to come, always talking about the future blessings which are to be, and they do not know that they have them already among them, they even turn upon His Church and revile her, saying, if necessary, in the face of all the evidences of her mission, that she is in league with the powers of evil.

Our Lord adds yet another argument from the facts of the case, as they might have been perceived by the Jews.

It is in some sort a continuance and drawing out of the former. He appeals to what is going on around them, and before their eyes, not only in the casting out of devils by the finger of God, but in the invasion and conquest of the whole kingdom of Satan by the power of the Gospel preaching. This was a great deal more than the simple casting out of devils. Even this had been performed by our Lord on a far more extensive scale than in the ordinary ministrations of the synagogue. But this was not all. The kingdom of Satan had been attacked on every side. Satan himself had been quelled by our Lord in His single encounter with him at the time of His temptation in the wilderness, and he had gone away defeated and cowed. He had found nothing in Him, as afterwards at the time of the Passion he was to find nothing in Him. All his wiles and devices had turned out absolutely of no avail against Him Whom he suspected to be the Incarnate Son of God, but Whose humility and low condition in the world completely blinded and baffled him. But the temptation had not been quelled by our Lord for Himself only, nor had His victory profited only Himself. How could He profit, what had He to gain, by a victory over Satan? Nothing for Himself, but much for us. From that time the destruction of the kingdom of evil had begun. Thousands had been rescued from him already by the preaching of St. John, and then our Lord began to preach, and to teach and to work miracles, and every step on His onward path was a defeat of Satan. It was a blow to him to lose the dominion over the bodies of men whom he might for a time possess, but now his hold on souls was being broken off. Our Lord had already gathered together a multitude of followers who were to become, after many defections, perhaps, the nucleus of the future Church, and He had spread far and wide over the country



the true and life-giving teaching of the Gospel, so different, both in attractiveness and in power, from the traditions and percepts of the Old Law, and men were flocking into the new Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven suffering violence, and the violent carrying it away. This was what was going on all around these miserable men, who were cavilling at the Teacher sent from God, and letting the publicans and harlots pass them in the road to Heaven. ‘How can any one enter into the house of a strong armed man and rifle his goods, unless he first bind the strong man, and then he will rifle his goods and his house?’

St. Mark puts the words affirmatively instead of interrogatively, and it is very likely that our Lord used first the one form and then the other. The picture is easily to be understood, but it is very instructive to consider what it is that our Lord implies by His use of it. He implies that the dominion of Satan in the world, before He Himself came to conquer him, and set men free from his tyranny, was like nothing more than the peaceful tranquil possession of a strong armed man of the house and goods which belong to him as his own. God had started mankind after the fall, and again after the flood, with a certain amount of knowledge of Himself, with the law of right written in their hearts by nature, with a cluster of holy traditions to keep up the memory of the truth, with the knowledge of their own fall and the promise of a Redeemer, with the constant witness to Himself contained in the order and beauty and tender care for creatures manifested in the visible universe, with the lesson of a particular Providence over them, speaking to them from the order of the world in which they dwelt, and from their own personal experience. One by one the devils had conquered these defences, as it were, of man. They had almost obli-

terated the knowledge of God in the human heart, they had placed themselves on the altars of a thousand shrines as the objects of an impure worship, attractive to the lower part of man's nature by its very impurity, they steeped the whole of human life, as far as was allowed them, in the foulest corruption and hardest cruelty, so that there hardly remained a standard of morality to look to, or a law of conscience to uphold the struggling relics of good in the human heart. The result of this was the utter darkness and degradation in which our Lord found mankind. In truth the strong armed man was in peaceable possession. Scarcely a voice was lifted against him. Only in the chosen nation which God had placed under the iron discipline of the law of Moses, was there comparative light, the inestimable blessing of the knowledge of the one God, and of His promises for the salvation of the world. And even over a great portion of the chosen nation Satan had extended his reign.

Our Lord's words imply that the first process in the redemption of the world and the establishment of the new Kingdom had necessarily been the binding of the strong armed man. Satan had first been subdued, before his house could be rifled. It is remarkable how familiar this thought is to the prophets and to the saints of the New Testament in their Canticles. When our Lord read in the synagogue at Nazareth the passage of Isaias which He chose for the most perfect exposition of His own mission, it was a passage which promised deliverance of the captive and liberty to the bruised. Our Blessed Lady's Canticle contains the same idea. By the side of her own exaltation and blessedness, she places the scattering the proud in the imagination of their hearts, the putting down the mighty from their seat. These words may apply primarily to the casting of the



proud and rebellious spirits from their thrones in Heaven, but they may also convey an allusion to the deposition of Satan and his followers from the thrones they had usurped on earth. The great work of the Incarnation was no child's play. It involved an immense change in the condition of the world, not only in the interior of the hearts of men—though there never can be a great change there without external manifestation and influence on the state of things outside—but also in the state of society, of social life, of the relations of men one to another, of governments and polities. Even externally, to the eye that could judge truly, the world was a great Palace or Temple of Satan. The devils were worshipped in a thousand shrines, and all this worship was to cease, the temples were to be either destroyed or left to rot away, the whole system of the established idolatry, as we should term it, was to be destroyed, with the thousand material institutions and endowments which were attached to it, and which secured to it the allegiance of a vast number of interested families. The heathen religion, consisting in the worship of devils under the name of gods, had taken possession of social life, of civil and military administration, and all this was to be changed. The public amusements, the theatres, the schools, the literature of the people, were all saturated with devilry, and all this was to be destroyed and supplanted in due time by the Christian system in all these particulars. And still more, of course, the reign of Satan in the hearts and lives and minds of men was to be overthrown. He ruled them by their passions and lusts, which he encouraged them to indulge, by the things of sense and the allurements of the world, by covetousness, by ambition, by revenge and hatred, and by the whole array of temporal goods which he promised them, as he ventured to promise them to

our Lord, if they would fall down and worship him. In all these matters he was to be despoiled, his palace was to be entered by force, and his weapons taken away, his goods by which he tempted and enslaved men, were to be torn from his grasp, and handed over to his enemies. Men were to be taught the truth concerning God, concerning themselves, concerning the world and life, and death, and time, and eternity. They were to be endowed with graces which would enable them, if they would, to withstand his assaults, and those of his satellites. They were to learn a religion which made virtue easy and happiness possible, which set in order alike the state of the world outside man and his own inner conscience. He was to be at peace with himself, and with his God, and with his neighbour, and to know how to use the good things of this fleeting life without abusing them, to restrain his passions, to elevate his aims and aspirations, to lead a life after the pattern of an Incarnate God, and to have his conversation in Heaven while passing as a pilgrim through this valley of exile, changed into an outer court of Paradise by the exercise of the Christian virtues. And the new Kingdom was to take possession of the external world also, and to write its gentle supremacy on every department of human and social life, with an universality and a thoroughness of dominion at least equal to those of the usurpation which it had overthrown.

This is what our Lord describes as the rifling of the goods of the strong armed man, by One Who is stronger than he. This is to be the fruit and issue, not the first seed and the beginning of the Kingdom of God. There is something required for this, before it can happen, as He says. That something is the binding of the strong armed man, and this, as He implies, is what has been going on the midst of the people who were cavilling at



Him and calumniating Him. Some of the holy Fathers and writers on the Gospel have differed among themselves as to the exact interpretation of the binding of Satan which our Lord declares either to have taken place or to be in process of execution, and some of them connect this passage in the Gospels with the famous passage in the Apocalypse of St. John, in which it is said that an Angel is seen coming down from Heaven and laying hold of the old dragon, and the old serpent which is the devil and Satan, and binding him for a thousand years, after which he is to be loosed for a little time.<sup>3</sup> This is thought by many among the Fathers to signify the binding of Satan during the time of the reign of the Church, before the last great apostasy and persecution, in the time of Antichrist, when Satan will be loosed and allowed, for a short period, to use all his tremendous natural power for the seduction of men, just before the Second Coming of our Lord. But till that last period comes, they think that he is himself confined to Hell, and not allowed to go forth himself for the temptation of men, which, however, he carries on by means of his followers and subordinates. If it be asked when this binding of Satan took place, it is answered, with the greatest probability, that it was not accomplished till after the Passion of our Lord, though Satan must have been greatly weakened and beaten down by many things which occurred before, especially the defeat of his assaults on our Lord Himself at the time of the Temptation. Our Lord does not, in this passage, speak of the binding of Satan as a thing already accomplished, but as a thing which has been begun, as a necessary preliminary to that process of the conquest of His Kingdom which He describes as the rifling of the goods of the strong armed man. This process may

<sup>3</sup> Apoc. xx. 23.

be dated back even before the Incarnation itself, for at the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Lady the binding of Satan may be said to have been begun. Afterwards it was carried on further and further, as at the Incarnation and Nativity of our Lord, at the sanctification of St. John Baptist and by the whole course of his preaching and that of our Lord Himself, and a great step in it may have been the frequent dispossessions wrought by our Lord and by the Apostles, and the seventy disciples whom He sent out to preach in His Name during His lifetime. And then the binding of the arch-enemy may have been consummated and concluded for the time when our Lord entered triumphantly into the possession of His Kingdom at His Resurrection and Ascension. The thousand years of the Apocalyptic vision may be understood naturally of the duration of the power of the Church in the world up to the last, and it may be thought, as some Fathers teach, that during this time, and up to the revelation of Antichrist, Satan is bound by the power of God and prevented from putting forth his full strength and wonderful cunning for the destruction of mankind. And the force of the argument in this passage now before us may be, that the whole course of our Lord's preaching was step after step in the direction of the weakening and binding of Satan, in which process the dispossessions of so many who were before under his power held a conspicuous part, so much so that it rendered the calumny of the Scribes from Jerusalem plainly untrue.

The words which follow next in the relation of St. Matthew, and which are omitted in St. Mark's account, are full of important meaning in themselves, and also as connecting the preceding words with the sequel. 'He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that



gathereth not with Me scattereth.' It is just because they are a link between two different subjects in this discourse of our Lord, that it is not certain to which of the two subjects they refer. That is, it is not certainly obvious on the face of the passage whether these words refer to Satan or to the Scribes and Pharisees themselves. Our Lord had been refuting by calm and simple reasoning the calumnies of the Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem, by which He was Himself accused of a league with the devil when He cast out devils. He had first shown the absurdity of imagining that Satan was fighting against himself,—Satan was too wise in his own policy, and too full of hatred against God and man to commit the folly of undoing with one hand what he was labouring at with the other. His kingdom, miserable as it was, was not divided against itself, consciously and of set purpose. Then He had appealed to the fact that the practice of exorcism was nothing new, and that they themselves acknowledged, in scores of instances, that it was a lawful exercise of power over demons, which belonged to the ministers of the true religion. Thus on the first ground their cavil was absurd, on the second ground it was gratuitous and malicious. It was founded on a wicked judgment, which they did not form in other cases. Then it seems that our Lord's thoughts passed to the warfare that He was waging against Satan, with whom He was supposed or asserted to be in league, and He spoke in short but clear words of that warfare, and of the part in it which this exercise of power over the devils had to fill. It was one of the essential preliminaries to the utter overthrow of the kingdom of evil, and the setting up of the heavenly Kingdom in its place on which He was engaged. This would naturally bring before our Lord's mind, if we may so speak, the whole

of that great enterprise for which He had come on earth, the conditions under which it was to be pressed on, and the enemies of various kinds by whom it would be opposed. The conditions of the enterprise were such that none could be neutral in the conflict which it involved. He had begun already to bind Satan, with the further purpose of rifling his house and depriving him of his arms and of his possessions. It would be absurd to think that Satan could be indifferent to the measures taken against himself. It was absurd to think that he could care nothing for the deliverance of mankind, and for the destruction of his own supremacy over their souls and bodies. It was certain that Satan could have no part in this, could make no compact with Him who was doing this in his despite. On the contrary, Satan could be nothing but an enemy and an active opponent of such a work. Our Lord's enterprise was one of aggression on Satan. If Satan did not resist it, he was fighting against himself, and if he did not help it on he could but oppose it with all his might. 'He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth.' Therefore the fact that our Lord cast out devils by the finger of God and by the Spirit of God, considered in the light of this truth, was a fresh and convincing proof that the Kingdom of God had come upon them.

But the words of our Lord, as has been said, are so fitting for the transition which now naturally follows, from the thought of the great adversary of God and man with whom He had been calumniously stated to be in confederation, to that of the other adversaries before Him, who were doing the work of the devil by this very calumny, that it has seemed to many commentators on this passage that they are rather the preparation for the terrible words which follow than a



continuation of the same subject of the conflict between Satan and our Lord. That is, they seem naturally to introduce the subject of the sin against the Holy Spirit, of which these miserable men were now making themselves guilty. It is as if our Lord had said, 'Take heed what you are doing in this charge against Me of a league with the evil spirits whom I cast out. The work on which I am engaged, and of which this is a part, is one which forces you to take one side or the other; you must either place yourselves on My side, or you must enlist under the banner of the open enemies of God.' It is not always the case that there is no neutral ground with respect to a work that is to be carried on. In the ordinary works of human life it is not so. We do not oppose the building of a house or the cultivation of a farm, or any other such work, by taking no part in it. But if, when a house is burning, we do not help, when we can, in extinguishing the flames, we help on the fire. If when a ship is sinking we do not exert ourselves to save the crew or passengers, we are helpers in their destruction. If in the time of the invasion of our country we do not rush to arms in her defence, we are on the side of the invaders. So it is in all cases, as we call them, of life or death. To stand aloof is to take a part against the work that has to be done. So it is also in all that concerns the salvation of men by Jesus Christ. God is our Lord and Master, and has a right to our service, and if we refrain from taking our place on the side of God, we take a place among the rebel angels on the side of evil. The nature of the work on which God engages when He undertakes the salvation of man, makes it impossible for any one to have, so to say, the miserable right of neutrality.

This is true, even of that unconscious influence which

every one of us exercises on those among whom he lives, and on the whole world around him. He either is with God or against God. He either gathers with our Lord or he scatters. It is a most terrible truth that we are always contributing in one way or the other, to the salvation or the loss of those around us. We are either promoting the cause of virtue, truth, perfection, or the cause of imperfection, laxity, error, and vice. This is one of the conditions under which we live. We must either edify or disedify our neighbour, take part with our Lord or take part against Him. Thus it is that we all have need constantly to repeat the words of the Psalmist, 'Who can understand sins? Who can tell how often he offends? From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare thy servant.'<sup>4</sup> But this truth about the impossibility of neutrality in the warfare by which man is delivered from sin and from the bondage of the evil one, is not only generally valid in regard of that perpetual exercise of influence on one side or on the other, which is inevitable in the case of men situated as we are, but it has also a peculiar importance in all that concerns the means by which it pleases God to ordain that His Kingdom should be advanced on earth. The whole work of the advancement of the Kingdom of God is the work, in an especial manner, of God the Holy Ghost, and we have seen how the conduct of our Lord Himself in His Ministry is often spoken of as being under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The whole of the economy, as the Fathers love to call it, of the Incarnation and the salvation of the world thereby, was carried out by the operation of the Holy Spirit. It was the appointed scheme of God for man's redemption, and it was not merely proposed to man as a thing he might accept or not, and be without

<sup>4</sup> Psalm xviii. 13.



guilt if he did not accept it,—it was proposed to him as a thing which God commanded him to accept, although He did not force his will to its acceptance. It is not free to man, in this sense, to reject the Gospel, to leave it on one side and pay no attention to its claims and the evidence by which those claims were supported. The Gospel was the Word of the Lord, the Master, the Lawgiver, the Judge. It was enough to decline to attend to it to incur guilt, in addition to the guilt of the sins from which it was intended to deliver man. Faith was to be meritorious, and incredulity a sin sufficient for condemnation. And as the Gospel was the message of a Sovereign and imperative on the allegiance of men, so also was it a message and a work which it was not lawful for men to gainsay without incurring fresh guilt.

Again, as guilt was incurred by not accepting it, so also was guilt incurred by not helping on its acceptance with others, because it was a positive decree of God, and it was sinful not to attend to it, and the guilt of rejecting it was incurred even by a pretended neutrality. In this sense, not to be with our Lord in this great work was to be against Him. The work was hindered if it was not embraced. Not to gather with Him was to scatter, that is positively to undo the work which He was doing. Those who acted in that way could only do so on the false principle that it is optional to embrace the salvation which God had ordained, or not to embrace it. But this is only the first part of the truth which seems to be folded up, as it were, in our Lord's words. For this truth also involves another, namely, that in the designs of God, the carrying out of the great benefit of the Incarnation and the establishment of the kingdom founded upon it, are committed, in a most true sense, to all men, though not to all in an equal degree. Parents

have a mission to further the Kingdom of the Gospel with regard to their children, superiors to their subjects, friends to their friends, and so on. This 'commandment concerning his neighbour' is as truly imposed on man in the matter of religion, as it is in the natural society which is the institution of God. The neglect of this commandment is the real cause of the apparent failure of the Church in the conquest of the world.

And lastly, if no one can be neutral in a case such as this, much less can those be neutral who are, by their vocation and position, officially bound to take the side of God. Those to whom our Lord was speaking belonged to the divinely appointed ecclesiastical order, they were the responsible teachers and guides of the people, the shepherds of the flock of God. Their responsibility, therefore, was far greater than that of others. These men, therefore, were under an accumulated weight of obligation towards the work on which our Lord was occupied. And yet they were taking a part of which it was to speak very gently indeed to say, he that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth. For they occupied in great measure the position which the Catholic Hierarchy in all its grades, from the highest to the lowest, occupies in regard to any action of the Holy Spirit in the Church that can be even distantly compared to that which was now going on in the preaching of the Gospel. But the still more heinous character of the sin which the Scribes from Jerusalem had committed, by attributing the work of God in the dispossession of the devils to the devil himself, must be reserved for treatment in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER II.

### *The Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.*

St. Matt. xii. 31, 32; St. Mark iii. 28—30 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 56.

THE words of our Lord which now follow in the narrative of the two earliest Evangelists, seem, as has been said, to depend on the sentence immediately preceding them. Our Lord seems to have had in His mind the terrible case of those adversaries of His, who were being driven from sin to sin in their opposition to Him. They had begun, perhaps, by wishing and saying to themselves that their line should be to take no part concerning Him at all, to leave things alone and to range themselves neither against Him nor on His side, and they had found out by experience that this could not be, for their position, as the rulers and authorities of the people to whom He was specially sent, forced on them the responsibility, whether they chose it or not, of taking a side. They must say something, and they could not speak for Him, on account of their own interests and corrupt hearts. So they were forced on and on, to the most furious and reckless opposition, and now at last they had been driven so far as to have to calumniate the very works of power and mercy by which His mission was authenticated by the Providence of the Father and by the action of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord, as we have seen, first reasoned with them on the foolishness of the only theory on which their assertion could be maintained, and had then appealed to the

instances, before their eyes and within the experience of all, of the practice of exorcism which was customary among some of the ministers of their own Temple and synagogues. But He has more to say to them than this. He has to pass a most severe sentence on the sin of which they were making themselves guilty, and by so doing to leave a warning to all time against similar opposition to the truth as evidenced by the works of God.

‘Therefore I say to you, every sin<sup>a</sup> and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men, but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven. All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and the blasphemies wherewith they shall blaspheme. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but he that shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in the world to come. He shall never have forgiveness, but shall be guilty of an everlasting sin. Because they said He hath an unclean spirit.’ These simple and solemn words raise, as is seen at once, two great questions—what is the sin here spoken of, and in what sense is it that our Lord says of it, that it is an everlasting sin, and that, unlike all other sins, it shall never be forgiven either in this world or in the world to come?

With regard to the first of these questions, without going into the history of the many explanations which have been given of the meaning of our Lord, it is sufficient to say, that the sin of which He is speaking is clearly that of which the men whom He is addressing had been guilty. They had deliberately attributed to the agency of Satan the miraculous works which had been wrought by our Lord, as evidences of the truth of His mission, and these works were, as has been said, the works of the Holy Ghost. It is said in the Sacred



Scriptures that all the works of our Lord were wrought by means of the Holy Ghost, by Whom He had been anointed, according to the famous passage of Isaias which He Himself read in the synagogue of Nazareth at the very opening of His Ministry. But if this is true of the works of mercy, of the preaching of the Gospel to the poor, and of the other actions of our Lord, it was in a special sense true of that particular work of power and mercy, which consisted in the casting out of the devils, as our Lord expressed it in this passage, by the finger of God, that is, by the Holy Ghost. The Spirit in Which our Lord cast out these devils was the Holy Spirit of God, and these men, in fact, called Him the evil spirit or the unclean spirit, the prince of the devils. This was the calumny or blasphemy against the Holy Ghost of which there is here mention, and we conclude from the context of our Lord's words that He means to speak, if not exclusively, yet directly and particularly of this blasphemy as aimed, not simply against the Person of the Holy Ghost, as for instance it might be in the case of those who deny the Divinity of the Third Person in the Ever Blessed Trinity, but as directed against the Holy Ghost in His special office as the witness to the truth of the mission of the Incarnate Son, whether in His own Person or in the continuation of His work by the instrumentality of the Catholic Church. For there is a malice of a peculiar character and blackness in thus opposing, by the engines of lying and calumny, the very operations of that most Blessed Spirit in the way of evidencing to men the great work of the Redemption by means of Jesus Christ. Because these operations embody, in a particular manner and degree, the merciful counsels and designs of God for the salvation of the human race, they are the very credentials with which He has chosen in His wisdom

to recommend to the minds and hearts of men those truths, by faith in which He intends them to be saved. This kind of blasphemy, in regard to its malice and its mischievousness, may be compared to the act of persons who might intercept the provisions sent by some most beneficent sovereign to a starving population, and either poison them, or persuade the people, for whose salvation they were intended, that they were poison.

The power of calumny is marvellously great for evil, but no instance of such power can be imagined more deadly than this, that when God has invented a wonderful scheme of mercy and compassion, full of arrangements of infinite love and tenderness for the healing of all the ills of humanity, those for whom it is designed should be persuaded, and taught by authority in His Name, that it came from their most deadly enemy. The sin is more than a common blasphemy against God, as when it is said that He is unmerciful or unjust or cruel, or has created man for the purpose of tormenting him for ever. This blasphemy touches God in the very greatest exercise of His goodness and mercy, and it is more than a common lie to man, because it is a lie which makes him turn away from these very proofs by means of which, in the counsels of God, he was to be led to his own greatest good and saved from the most extreme and irremediable evils. To persuade man that these evidences, addressed to him by God in the carrying out of the economy of salvation, came in truth from the enemy of God and man, and to use for this purpose the authority and influence which they held, in consequence of their position as the representatives of the ecclesiastical chair of truth, was to impose on men, on the authority of God Himself, the duty of disbelieving the message of God, and of discrediting the Divine authentication of the message, and this not simply by



proclaiming it to be false, but by proclaiming it to be the work of the father of lies himself.

This enables us to understand the further words of our Lord, in which He declares that men who may speak a word against the Son of Man shall be forgiven, but that if they speak against the Holy Ghost they shall not be forgiven. It was not that it was a light thing to speak against the Son of Man. For He came to them, all sweetness and spiritual beauty, overflowing with grace and attractiveness of every kind, because God had so ordained to win the hearts of men by making Himself such as to draw them to Himself by condescension and loveliness. He was all holiness, and purity, and charity, shedding gifts of mercy on every side, and no one could find in Him a fault or suggest a sin. But still it did not go beyond ordinary human perversity to misunderstand Him, and to see in Him an occasion of scandal, foolish as it was. He had already complained of the manner in which they had misunderstood the gracious wisdom of God in sending, first St. John Baptist and then Himself, in different ways, the first in the way of austerity and the second in the way of condescension. They had said that the Baptist had a devil, and then they said that our Lord was a gluttonous man and a drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and of sinners. This was bad enough, but it was not more than might be expected of men such as the Jews. For, where there is pride and evil living, there there is certain to be an immense store of censoriousness, and a great unwillingness to embrace the truth, by which God is addressing men to win them from their sins, an unwillingness which makes them ever on the watch for flaws in the character of the messengers of God, so as to excuse themselves from the duty of listening to their message. Our Lord did not ask them to take His own word for Himself,

He appealed to the evidences by which His Father, in His Providence, gave a visible and undeniable sanction to His mission. His Divinity was hidden from their eyes, and He did not obtrude it on them, on the contrary, He kept it unspoken of, leaving it to the Father to lead men to the recognition of it. And so, to speak against Him, was bad indeed and wicked, but it was not bad and wicked with this peculiar and singular malice of which He is here speaking. It was an ordinary sin, an ordinary blasphemy, in the sense in which He here uses the word, to signify calumny and detraction against a person. It was a most direct assault against works and evidences distinctly and confessedly supernatural, against clear and unmistakeable exercises of authority over the evil spirits, an authority which can belong intrinsically to no one but to God, and which these men attributed to the prince of the evil spirits. This assertion involved many enormous falsehoods. It involved the falsehood that God was permitting Satan to use a kind of authority over the evil spirits, for the purpose of accrediting false claims, and supporting a lie preached in the name of God Himself. It involved the falsehood that the doctrine and claims of our Lord were such as Satan could support in his own interests, and thus the whole work of the Holy Ghost, both in the teaching and in the evidences which supported the teaching of our Lord, was declared to be false and Satanic, such as it was the duty of the priests of God to denounce and of the people of God to fly from. And this falsehood, as has been said, was uttered to the people by the mouths of those under whose care and authority they had been placed by the arrangement of God Himself.

It is hardly necessary to point out how entirely this interpretation of the sin of which our Lord is here



speaking, is borne out by the constant language of the writers of the New Testament. It is the doctrine of Sacred Scripture that the whole economy of Revelation and of the evidences by which it is accredited is the work of the Holy Ghost. This seems to be the meaning of the burning words of the first martyr, St. Stephen, when he reproached the Jews in their great assembly—‘You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did, so do you also. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain those who foretold of the coming of the Just One, of Whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers.’<sup>1</sup> The mission of the prophets was a prediction of, and also a sort of participation in, the mission of our Lord, and it is attributed in general to the Holy Ghost, and to resist it is to resist the Holy Ghost. It is unnecessary to point out how often our Lord Himself speaks of His own work in the same way. It is the same with the mission and work of the Church after Him. The decree of the First Council, held at Jerusalem, runs in official language, so to speak—‘It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.’<sup>2</sup> The language is the same of many individual acts of the chief Apostles, notably St. Peter in the exercise of his authority. He says to Ananias, ‘Why hath Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Ghost?’ and to Sapphira, ‘Why have you agreed together to tempt the Spirit of God?’<sup>3</sup>—the lie and the temptation being to the rulers of the Church. In the same way, in the case of the vision which revealed to St. Peter the immediate opening of the Church to the Gentiles, it is said: ‘As Peter was thinking of the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold three men seek thee,’ and when he gives an account of

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 51, 52.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xv. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Acts v. 3, 9.

this afterwards in Jerusalem, he says, 'The Spirit said to me that I should go with them, nothing doubting.'<sup>4</sup> The same language is used with regard to the mission of St. Philip for the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch: 'The Spirit said to Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot,' and again, 'The Spirit of the Lord took away Philip.'<sup>5</sup> It is the same with other prominent acts and steps in the development of the Church, and of the preaching of the Gospel, such as the mission of St. Paul and St. Barnabas for the first great Apostolical journey into the parts of the Gentiles, when it is said, 'The Holy Ghost said to them, Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work whereunto I have taken them,' and immediately after, 'They being sent by the Holy Ghost, went to Seleucia.'<sup>6</sup> Later on in the same history it is said of St. Paul and St. Silas, 'They were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia, . . . and they attempted to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not'<sup>7</sup>—Asia and Bithynia being two of the provinces in which, as we learn from his first Epistle, the Word had already been preached by St. Peter himself. Thus when St. Paul tells the priests of Ephesus that the 'Holy Ghost had placed them as bishops to rule the Church of God,'<sup>8</sup> he uses the same strictly Apostolic form of speech, and we know from the famous passage in the Epistle to the Corinthians, how all the diversities of operations and ministrations in the Church are to be in a special manner attributed to the Holy Ghost—the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the grace of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, interpretation of speeches, and the like.<sup>9</sup> In this passage St. Paul is certainly speaking of the same

<sup>4</sup> Acts x. 19 ; xi. 12.<sup>5</sup> Acts viii. 29, 39.<sup>6</sup> Acts xiii. 2, 4.<sup>7</sup> Acts xvi. 6, 7.<sup>8</sup> Acts xx. 28.<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 8, 9.



kind of evidences of the mission of the Church as these castings out of the devils in the case of our Lord, but the other passages go beyond this particular office of the Holy Ghost, and describe Him as ruling and guiding the Church, and especially its chief authorities, in the manner which belongs to Him as the Paraclete Whom our Lord was to send in His own Name.

If then this be the true account of the sin against the Holy Ghost of which our Lord is here speaking, we are already prepared for finding that it is, in His eyes, one of the most heinous, if not the most heinous, that can be committed. It is a sin of a peculiarly diabolical character, and fraught with the utmost mischief for the defeating of the good counsels of God for the salvation of mankind. The same consideration prepares us for a further truth, with regard to the manner in which God will deal with this sin. It is often said that there are certain sins as to which God cannot let Himself follow what is a very ordinary rule in His government of mankind, namely, the rule of waiting till the next world for the chastisement of offences against Himself. There are some sins which have a peculiar character of their own, inasmuch as they are direct assaults on the positive institutions of God, on His arrangements for salvation and for the propagation of the religion and Kingdom of His Divine Son, or, in general, such as bring His Name into discredit among the peoples of the world, unless they are speedily and conspicuously avenged. There is something of this kind about what is said to David after his sin with the wife of Urias and after his repentance: ‘Nevertheless, because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme because of this thing, the child that is born to thee shall surely die.’<sup>10</sup> That is, it belonged to the honour of the name of God

<sup>10</sup> 2 Kings xii. 14.

that some public and signal punishment should be exacted for the offence which had become public, and so that, though the guilt of the sin of David had been remitted on his repentance, and though the child that had been born to him had been brought within the covenant by means of circumcision, still that child should die, that it might be seen that God would not pass over such a sin. Thus, when God sends His messengers into the world, or when He establishes a Church for the salvation of mankind, He is in a manner bound to punish any public contempt of, or assault on, what He has so established, as well as to furnish those whom He sends with credentials that show that He has sent them, and to chastise those who wilfully and maliciously impugn their mission. And on this account it is that sins like heresy and schism, or persecution of the Church, or slanders against her doctrine or her ministers, or her system, are usually visited by exemplary chastisements, and this quite apart from the remission or non-remission of the guilt of such sins in individual cases. For it is not impossible for those who have sinned in this way to obtain pardon of their guilt by means of true penitence, if God vouchsafes them that grace. These are considerations concerning the sin here spoken of by our Lord which may serve to prepare us for the further statement on which we shall presently have to comment, contained in His words about the irremissibility of the sin in question.

Many beautiful things are to be found in the writings of the Fathers and commentators of the Church concerning this passage, which has given them occasion to draw out the peculiar enormity of the sins against the Holy Ghost as they are commonly called, and to show how it is that they are very difficult of forgiveness. The particular sin of these Scribes and Pharisees was



certainly one of the sins against the Holy Ghost, and has a character which is common to the others as well as to itself. The principle which seems to run through these comments is this, that certain sins are directly contrary to the very principle and source of the remission of sin, which is the goodness of God. It is this which in various ways and degrees is assailed by despair, by presumption, by obstinacy in evil, by continued impenitence, by envy at the spiritual good of another, and by the impugning of the known truth, which is the particular species of the sin against the Holy Ghost, in the general sense, under which the sin of the Scribes and Pharisees would probably fall. St. Augustine in one place speaks of three kinds of blasphemy, that which was committed out of infirmity, as when men were compelled by the fear of torments or of death to blaspheme, and this he says is against the Father, because it is a sin of weakness and so contrary to His power. He puts in the second place the blasphemy which was committed through ignorance, and this is against the Son, because it is against His wisdom, and in the third place, he tells us, there is the blasphemy which was committed out of malice, and this is against the Holy Ghost because it is against the goodness of God. And in the first two cases he says there are some extenuating circumstances, but in the last there are none. St. Bernard has the same ideas, but he speaks more generally of all sins instead of blasphemy in particular. He says that power is attributed to the Father, wisdom to the Son, and charity to the Holy Ghost. Sins committed out of frailty are against the power of the Father, sins committed out of ignorance are against the wisdom of the Son, and sins committed out of malice are against the Holy Ghost. And he says that sins of the two first kinds are more easily remitted on penitence in this

world, or, if they are carried into the next, they are remitted so far as to have a lighter punishment. But the sins of the third kind, even if repented of, are to be fully punished in this world, and if they are not repented of they will be punished in the next with the full measure of eternal damnation. St. Bernard therefore seems to recognize in this passage the doctrine mentioned above, that there may be some sins which even if forgiven, cannot be left without chastisement in this world. Other holy writers explain how it is that the sins against the Holy Ghost are so difficult of forgiveness, and how they are more or less connected one with the other. The goodness of God consists in the mixture of justice and mercy with which He governs the world, and to presume that He will not notice sins is to sin against His justice, while to despair is in the same way to deny His mercy. In each case the sin, whether of presumption or of despair, leads directly to impenitence and obduracy, for the motives of penitence are taken away, the presumptuous man thinking that he does not need it, and the despairing man thinking that he cannot gain anything by it. Further, we may notice in the comments of the Fathers and others on this passage, a strong tendency to explain the impossibility of which our Lord speaks of their forgiveness as meaning that such sins are very difficult to forgive, for the reason, already stated, namely, that sinners of this kind shut the very door of hope against themselves, as if it had been said that those who persevere in impenitence should not be able to find forgiveness.<sup>11</sup>

It now remains to see how the words of our Lord can be explained, with reference to that particular sin against the Holy Ghost, of which He had an instance before

<sup>11</sup> See Ludolphus, *in loc.*



Him in the case of these Scribes and Pharisees. Our Lord seems certainly to make a strong contrast between these sins and other sins, even blasphemies, and the contrast consists in this, that these sins shall not, like others, be forgiven in this world or in the world to come. And certainly no sin can be imagined more difficult of forgiveness than the direct opposition to the provision made by God for the remission of sin, carried to the extent of a calumnious imputation of diabolical action in the very evidences chosen by God for the authentication of those provisions. For the whole of the good counsel of God for the remission of sins is contained in the mission of Jesus Christ, and if this mission be so calumniated as to be imputed to the enemy of God and man, the way for the reception of that remission is directly blocked by the action of the very men who, most of all, need forgiveness and the application of those means of grace against which they have been speaking. The words of our Lord in St. Mark seem to imply that the cause for which there shall be no remission is that the sin cannot be removed: 'He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost shall never have forgiveness, but shall be guilty of an everlasting sin.'

It must first be remembered that our Lord does not simply say that this sin shall never be forgiven, but that it shall not be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come. We must naturally apply to this language the light which the Catholic doctrine of the remission of sin affords us, and we learn from that doctrine that the guilt of a mortal sin can never be forgiven in the next world if it is not forgiven in this world. That which can be forgiven in the next world is the pain or penalty of sin, whether mortal or venial, and, in the case before us, it is not easy to suppose that our Lord is speaking

of any sin but of the blackest character. He therefore uses the word forgiveness in the sense compatible with this doctrine, and we are therefore naturally led to think of that remission of sin which consists in the remission of pain, or at the very least, of that remission of sin which includes this remission of pain. And indeed it is true to say that this is the one, full, adequate sense of the word remission in the mouth of our Lord and in the intention of God, for when He gave to the Church the power of the forgiveness of sins, He gave it in its fulness, as the administration of the reconciling power of the Precious Blood shed upon the Cross, and on the supposition of right and perfect dispositions on the part of those whose sins are forgiven. But if these dispositions are perfect in the penitent, it is the full natural effect of the remission of sins, through the Precious Blood, that the pain should be done away with as well as the guilt. This is the effect of the application of the merits of the Passion to the soul in the Sacrament of Regeneration, and, supposing contrition to be perfect, in the Sacrament of Penance also. And when the Church exercises her power of remitting the pain alone, after the guilt has been remitted, by the granting of Indulgences, she does not exercise any power that was not conferred on the Apostles by the simple words of our Lord, 'Whose sins you remit they are remitted, whose sins you retain they are retained.' She uses that power in a way different from that in which it is used in the Sacrament of Penance, but it is the same power, and the words used by our Lord naturally convey it.

We are so accustomed to the separation between the two parts of the perfect forgiveness of sins which our Lord has purchased for us, that the word forgiveness with us seems most particularly to signify the remission or the cancelling of guilt. But the word which is thus



rendered in our language signifies in Greek indifferently the remission of guilt and the remission of pain, or the remission of both, and indeed the Scriptural use of it seems to require at least the inclusion of the reference to pain. Thus it may well be supposed, as has been seen in the last volume, that when our Lord said to the blessed Magdalene the loving words: ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee,’ He meant to give her plenary absolution from pain as well as from guilt, and that her contrition might have been quite enough even when she entered the room in which our Lord was to make her free from guilt, though not from the debt of pain. If this meaning may be used in regard to positive statements as to the twofold remission of guilt and of pain, it may also be used of negative statements such as that before us, in which it is said that sins shall not be or are not forgiven. That is, it may be understood that such negative statements are meant to convey the meaning that, putting aside all question of the cancelling of the guilt of such sins by penitence, the debt of pain due to the justice of God will still remain, and that its discharge will be insisted on in the justice and providence of God in this world as well as in the next. The most literal translation of the words would be, ‘It shall not be let off to him, it shall not be allowed to pass unpunished, either in this world or in the world to come.’ Thus the words may be understood as declaring that the sins of which our Lord is speaking are so heinous and so contrary to the execution of the designs of God for the salvation of mankind, that whenever they are committed He will take care to inflict on them some special punishment both in this world and in the world to come. He will not let them go unpunished even in this life, even although He still may be forced by the impenitence

of those who commit them to punish them also severely in the next. As a general rule God does not do this—He ordinarily leaves the greater part at least of the punishment of sin for the world that is to come, and His patience with many kinds of sinners is made a subject of complaint by His friends, as the prosperity which is permitted to be the lot of the wicked is an occasion of perplexity. Our Lord may mean that such shall not be the case with sins of this enormous guilt, that their punishment shall be swift, and signal, and public, and present. And here again we may see the mercifulness of our Lord in thus threatening His enemies with immediate and temporal punishment, for that is often the only way to bring certain hardened sinners to the sense of their iniquities. So St. Francis Xavier in his letter of advice to Father Baertz, whom he was sending to Ormuz, a place famous for profligacy of every worst kind, recommends his disciple, in dealing with enormous sinners, such as he was likely to meet with in that sink of every iniquity, to threaten them with temporal punishments at the hand of God even in this life, in the hopes of thus converting men whom other motives could not have any power to move.

This interpretation seems to have the advantage of explaining the unusual language of our Lord, for it is not usual with Him to distinguish between forgiveness in this world and in the next. It has also the advantage of being founded on the Scriptural usage of the Greek word here employed. But the great majority of Catholic commentators have taken the word forgiveness in the more restricted sense, inasmuch as the forgiveness of guilt must precede the remission of pain, and they have understood our Lord as speaking with reference to guilt. And in this sense the words may be considered as spoken prophetically, rather than, so to say, juridically,



as if our Lord foresaw that none of those who had made themselves guilty of this enormous sin would ever seek for pardon in true penitence—and that thus it is true that the sin shall never be forgiven, because as a matter of fact, no one guilty of it will ever have the grace to repent of it. Thus He said later on of the miserable Judas, that it would have been better for that man that he had never been born, not that it was impossible for Judas to repent of his crime, or that if he had repented, his crime would never have been forgiven,—for there was mercy and love for Judas in the Sacred Heart of Him Whom he had betrayed—but that He foresaw that Judas never would repent in a salutary manner, and so close with the pardon which would have been offered to him if he could have wept over his offences as St. Peter wept. In this sense a number of things never will happen which are not yet absolutely and intrinsically impossible, and thus the words come to mean, not that there is any sin for which the Precious Blood shed on the Cross has not made abundant reparation to the justice of God, not that there is any sin which God could not forgive for the sake of His Blessed Son, but that, historically speaking, there will be no instance of such a remission. If our Lord foresaw this, it was a part of that charity which had guided all His former words to these miserable men that He should give them this solemn warning, for many of them might be rather on the brink of the precipice than as yet plunged into the gulf below, and it might also be useful and charitable for others to be warned of the extreme hopelessness of such a sin.

In accordance with this latter interpretation, these words of our Lord signify the fact that persons guilty of sins of this enormous malice are hardened against the possibility of penitence, such as would lead to their

pardon, and that this fact holds good so generally that it is not too much to say that the sins in question will never be forgiven, and this although it remains true that the Sacrifice of the Cross atones for the sins of the whole world. This interpretation is quite consistent with the truth of the former, according to which our Lord asserts that sins of the kind of which He is here speaking are so displeasing to God, and involve so much of rebellion against His government of the world, that He will not consent to leave them in any case unpunished in this world as well as in the next. For this truth includes two distinct statements, that even if the guilt of such sins should be washed away by penance and by the application of the Precious Blood shed on the Cross, still there must nevertheless be some signal and public chastisement for the assault made on the designs and decrees of God, and, in the second place, that even if the sin is not repented and forgiven as to its guilt, God will nevertheless visit it by condign punishment in this world as well as in the next, He will not put off the day of His vengeance altogether till the next world, because it belongs to the honour of His Name and His Kingdom that men should see even in this life, what it is that such sinners incur by their temerity. As if it had been said to them, as is said in the Book of Numbers, ‘Know ye that your sin shall overtake you,’<sup>12</sup> both here and hereafter. This is a distinct element in the full description of such sins and of the manner in which God deals with them, and the words of our Lord may be intended to convey it to us in this place. And still further, many of the holy writers of the Church allow that the words before us may mean simply that which they seem at first sight to mean, namely, that there is this particular sin which God will

<sup>12</sup> Num. xxxii. 23.



not forgive either in this world nor in the next, by which is meant, according to the analogy of Scripture, that this particular sin is one for which it is most difficult indeed to obtain remission. It is not that there is any sin of man for which atonement has not been made on the Cross, or that there is any guilt which can go beyond the healing power of the Precious Blood, but that the dispositions of the hearts that can be guilty of a sin of this character are so bad and so hardened, that it is in the highest degree difficult for such a sin to be pardoned. For it cannot be doubted that there are some kinds of sin more easy, and some more difficult, than others of remission, not so much on account of the blackness of their guilt and the intensity of their malice, as on account of the peculiar difficulties which they present to the process of grace by which remission is to be obtained. And what is thus so extremely difficult is sometimes spoken of in Sacred Scripture as impossible.

Both these last-named interpretations do not lay much stress on the words of our Lord about the impossibility of remission in the case spoken of, either in this world or in the next. They deal with the text almost as if those words did not form part of it, except in so far as it is usual with the same commentators to go on to point out that our Lord's language most clearly confirms the Catholic doctrine concerning the possibility of the remission of sins, in the sense explained, in the next world, that is, the cancelling of the debt due to the justice of God in the prison of Purgatory. It is worth while to remark that the second Evangelist does not insert the words now referred to, about this world and the next, and that he does add, as has been said, some other words of our Lord spoken at the same time, in which the offenders against the Holy Spirit are said to

be 'guilty of an eternal sin.' In some copies the word is not sin, but judgment, but it seems that this is one of the instances in which modern criticism has confirmed the reading of the Vulgate. The best manuscripts have the word 'sin.' The expression is very instructive, inasmuch as it shows us another aspect of the sin in question, which may have much to do with the very fearful character of this blasphemy. For a sin may be eternal, or continuing long after the death of the sinner who is guilty of it, if it be a sin which has propagated itself in the minds and conduct of others as well as in the soul of the person who committed it originally. Such are pre-eminently sins of scandal, slanders, lies, false doctrines, heresies, schisms, calumnies against the Church or against religious bodies. These sins live on in literature, in the works of those who have originated them, in the schismatical or heretical communities which have sprung up in consequence, and the like. It may be most truly said, that the sin of these Scribes and Pharisees may have had as much effect as any single thing, on the continual obstinacy of the Jewish nation in resisting the evidence of the Church. 'They still believe our Lord to have been the impostor and the ally of Satan that he was said to be by Annas and Caiaphas and their subordinates. In this sense the sins of this kind do not die with the sinners in whose hearts they have first been conceived, and who will be confronted by them at the last day in all the full-blown mischief and murder of souls in every generation after them, which have been written against them in the books of God. In this sense a sin can live on forever, as long as the world lasts, not only in its effects on the poor sinner who committed it himself, but in its effects on thousands and millions of others after him, and of course also in the punishment which corresponds



to its guilt. This is a distinct element in all sins of this kind, and it may have been our Lord's intention in these words, recorded by St. Mark, to warn the Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem of the fearful responsibility which they were incurring by their reckless slanders against Him.

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## CHAPTER III.

*Idle Words.*

St. Matt xii. 33—37 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 56.

AFTER laying down in general words the law by which sins, such as that of which the Scribes and Pharisees had been guilty, would be dealt with by God, our Lord proceeded to add some words which were addressed most pointedly to the state of mind and heart of these enemies of His own themselves. They were thoroughly inconsistent in their calumnies against Him, for they did not deny the goodness of His works, while at the same time they attributed those works to an evil principle. But as the tree is known by its fruits, it was unreasonable to call the fruit good and the tree evil. These words are to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, and they seem to have suggested to our Lord the kindred thought of the evil fruits which were so constantly meeting Him in His experience of the men of whom and to whom He was speaking. But after all, what else could be expected of them? They were, as St. John the Baptist had called them, 'serpents and a generation of vipers,' and how could they speak good things? That which the mouth utters comes from the abundance of the heart. The

heart of a good man is like a treasure, and out of it come forth spontaneously things as good as itself. And it is the same with the heart of a bad man, it is a treasury of evil, and in consequence his words are evil also. But this, of which they thought so little, did not render them excusable, nor was the effect of their words, uttered at random, confined to the moment at which they were spoken. Everything would have to be accounted for at the day of judgment. Then, for every idle word, an account was to be given, and by their words they were to be justified, or by their words they were to be condemned. Not that no account would be required of their thoughts or of their actions, but that it was wrong to suppose that no responsibility attached to words, as if they were less important and less compromising in the sight of God than actions or than thoughts.

‘Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree evil and its fruit evil. For by the fruit the tree is known. O generation of vipers, how can you speak good things, whereas you are evil? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.’ The first part of the argument, so to call it, by which our Lord answered the calumny of these Scribes and Pharisees, had been built mainly on the unreasonableness of attributing to Satan the conduct which they imputed to him, that is, of destroying his own kingdom in the world by cooperating with the teaching which was hostile to it with the utmost possible hostility. This had led our Lord on to speak of the warfare which He was waging



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with Satan, how He had come on him in His own superior might, and put him in bonds and destroyed his power and taken possession of the very things in which his dominion consisted. After this He had gone on, in the words last commented on, to speak of the terrible sinfulness of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, of which these men had made themselves guilty, and to declare the extreme severity of the judgment with which this sin should be visited by His Father. In the words now before us, ‘either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree evil and its fruit evil,” our Lord addressed Himself to them by an argument of simple reason, without connecting His words with the particular calumny which placed Him in alliance with the evil one. The truth to which He now appeals is a truth which might hold valid in any subject matter of human action and judgment. It is simply this, that such as the cause is, such is the effect, such as the effect such is the cause. If My words are good, then the source from which they proceed is good also, if My works are evil, then the source of them also is evil. You must say one thing or the other, you must make both the tree and its fruit either good or bad, not one good and the other bad, for the tree is known by its fruits, and the fruits show the tree. The fruits before you are the deliverances of many souls and bodies from the bondage of the devils. If this is a good fruit, then the tree is good. If the tree is bad, then you must say in all reasonableness that it is a bad and wicked thing to deliver men from the slavery of Satan. But if you say that it is a good and a blessed thing to deliver men from their enemy, and from the enemy of God, then acknowledge in all reason that the kingdom of God has come upon you, that He Whose words and teaching and claims are thus attested is the Messenger of God.

There is no passion or anger about these calm and simple words which appeal, as has been said, to the common reason of mankind. But those which follow, though certainly not passionate, are yet severe, for the image which He has used is enough to bring before our Lord these men themselves and the evil fruit from which they might be known to be evil. It would not require any extreme charity to form the conclusion as to the character of our Lord as reflected in His works, of which the last words speak. It required only reason and fairness in concluding naturally from facts before their eyes. And yet even this had not been found in them. Though they were the ministers of the altar and the teachers of the synagogue, they had not shown goodness enough for this common act of reasonable fairness. But how could it be otherwise with them? The piercing eye of the Incarnate Son saw down to the very bottom of their hearts, and there it discerned, not only the reason for their error, but the reason why they could not possibly, being what they were, be expected to speak or think otherwise. ‘O generation of vipers, how can you speak good things, whereas you are evil?’ As He had said on that former occasion, in the Sermon on the Mount, men do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Not all that is in the heart comes forth from the mouth, but all that comes from the mouth comes first from the heart. And in proportion as men are more or less on their guard, more or less thoughtful in what they say, or the reverse, so in proportion is it more easy to measure the heart from the words of the mouth. In another passage of which we shall have to speak later on, our Lord draws a terrible picture of the evils that proceed out of the heart of man, as if it were a sort of well of impurity and malice of every kind, bubbling out



poison and pollution on all around it. 'For from within, out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, false testimonies, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.' 'These evil things,' He added, 'proceed from within and defile a man.'<sup>1</sup> In the passage before us our Lord is speaking of the general truth that what a man is in his heart, that he is generally in his conversation, and that it is hopeless to expect virtuous, holy, and charitable conversation from an evil, a worldly and a corrupt heart. A man may restrain himself perforce and hide what is in his heart, but, in the eye of Him to Whom all things are bare, he reveals his hypocrisy or the motives of selfishness or human respect, for which he speaks what he does not mean. A man may lie, but his words then proceed from his lying heart. But the words of the immense majority of men ordinarily, and of all men except the most perfect, continually, are spoken without much forethought or deliberation, and are left without any examination afterwards to remain in the books of God until the Day of Judgment. What our Lord here teaches is that they are not really random and without a cause, which stamps on each one of them a peculiar character and not another. They reflect the heart, they are what the heart is, simple, thoughtless, vain, selfish, uncharitable, worldly, or the reverse, according to the moral character of the heart from which they proceed. Thus whatever people may talk about, whatever may be the subject or the occasion, whether they are full of information and purpose in what they say, or the merest frivolous killers of time and chatterers for the sake of chattering, they are all the time, in everything they say, revealing themselves and displaying one thing at least,

<sup>1</sup> St. Mark vii. 22, 23.

with unerring truthfulness, that one thing being their own hearts.

Our Lord then goes on to add another and a kindred truth, one which was necessary for the full treatment of the subject before Him, and is sufficient also for the correction of the evil to which His former words pointed. This truth is, that idle and careless as our words may be, they are still the matter of the judgment of God. We may make little account of them now, but they will be most strictly called to account at the last day. 'But I say to you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.' A great deal has been written on these solemn words, especially on the question of the exact meaning of the epithet 'idle,' which is here used by our Lord rather than any other more severe word, which might seem to be justified by the occasion. He does not say calumnious word, or blasphemous word, but idle word, and His expression seems very fairly rendered by our word 'idle.' It may be that our Lord has here shown at once His gentleness and His strictness, the former by using no harder word than idle of the calumnies and blasphemies of which He was here complaining, and the latter by the warning which His words convey against what seem to be the most excusable instances of the misuse of the gift of speech. It is very possible also, that some at least among the emissaries of the Chief Priests, who were now calumniating Him to the multitudes, spoke the evil words of which there is here question in an offhand, light-hearted manner, without much reflection on the terrible character of the charge which their words conveyed. For there is discernible, in the enemies of our Lord in the Gospel history, this element of frivolity and carelessness and



thoughtlessness, as well as the other of deep calculating policy and malice. The position of the Jewish hierarchy at Jerusalem in those days was one of great worldly prosperity and influence, and we may be quite certain that the Chief Priests had a number of ambitious worldly hangers-on, men who looked to success in the ecclesiastical career as the end of their life, men of no strictness or severity in their own conduct, and of no very deep religious faith. Such men would be the ready pliant tools of Annas or Caiaphas, and, without having much personal heart in the matter, would throw themselves into the work to which their superiors set them. The words of which our Lord is speaking had been uttered, apparently, after the dispossessions to which they directly referred had been accomplished, and were the expedient to which these men were driven in their resolution to find any explanation for the powers displayed by our Lord rather than that of the truth of His claims.

And, indeed, our Lord begins by reasoning with them as to the force of their own argument, as if they could not have considered beforehand the import of what they were saying. And thus the words which had drawn from Him that most severe denunciation as to the sin which should never be left unpunished, may have been lightly spoken, as so many evil words are every day lightly spoken against adversaries in religion or in worldly matters, by persons full of sectarian prejudice or political rancour, of which it can hardly be thought that they would be deliberately spoken if those who have uttered them had reflected on their own responsibilities. They come out in moments of irritation and difficulty, for the sake of getting rid of a fact or an argument which ruffles the animosities of party, or implies a flaw in a favourite doctrine. And our Lord may have meant to warn them

of the general fault, which had led to their offence in this particularly dangerous subject-matter, the fault of carelessness in the use of their tongues, which had led them so lightly to pour forth the malignity that was in their hearts. He may have meant also to leave behind Him in the Gospels this warning, not for His enemies only, or for those only who might be tempted to the enormous sin of which the words of the Pharisees were making them guilty, but for His children and His friends to the end of time—the warning against the most common cause of sin in many who lead a sinful life, and of imperfection and tepidity in those who ought to be making daily advances in their spiritual condition, in the unguarded tongue. This warning would have been wanting to us in the words of our Lord Himself, although it is urged on us by St. James and by other of the holy writers, if our Lord had not spoken so gently of the calumnies by which He was now assailed, and which, no doubt, very seriously injured His cause in the minds of the people, as simply the issue of idle words, instead of the very grave moral and spiritual faults of which these enemies of His were guilty.

It has been thought by some commentators on this passage that the word idle must here bear the signification of calumnious or blasphemous, but it is better to understand it simply in its ordinary sense. As has already been said, the use which our Lord makes of it in this context is indeed frightening, on account of its severity, as well as remarkable for its gentleness with regard to the particular case to which it is applied. For it sounds a terrible thing to be told that every thoughtless, and careless, and even every unprofitable word, shall be made the subject of the strict judgment of the last day. But yet this is a truth which no one can question, though it is most easy to forget it, and it only comes to



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this, that we are always responsible beings, always on our trial before the justice of God, and that our words, multitudinous as they are, are quite as much objects of this Divine scrutiny as our thoughts or our actions. We can never free ourselves from our responsibility, we can never live a day or an hour during which we are not what God has made us, His free and intelligent creatures, on our way to the eternity which depends on our own choice, and on our use of the faculties and the life which He has given us. And if we so manage our lives and conduct as to forget altogether our obligations, and the serious work for which God has placed us in this world, our forgetfulness of these things does not exempt us from the account which we shall have to give of ourselves at the last.

The simple truth that anything is to be subjected to the solemn judgment of God, and that it is to have its effect on our condition of happiness or of misery throughout all eternity, not merely as deciding, or helping to decide, what that condition shall be, but also as increasing our eternal happiness or our eternal misery, according to the character which it shall wear in the eyes of our Judge—this simple truth is enough of itself to make the thing of which it is true a subject of earnest thought and care. The great thought of the presence of God, and the holy practice of the constant and vigilant examination of conscience, naturally tend to make men very circumspect about their words, when they have once mastered the truth of which our Blessed Lord here speaks. All the saints bear witness to the extreme difficulty of avoiding altogether the faults of the tongue, though, on the other hand, this knowledge of theirs had not made them avoid the use of speech, nor afraid to commit themselves to the intercourse with their fellow-creatures in which conversation is an essential part. For

they know that they may sin as much by uniform and unbroken and churlish silence as by inordinate speech, and that there is an almost endless field of good open to those who use the gift of speech aright. To give ourselves to silence, because of this doctrine of our Lord, would be to imitate the unprofitable servant in the parable, who went and hid his talent, or pound, in the earth or in a napkin. When the holy writers of the ascetical life count up for us the faults of which the tongue is capable, they place among them the fault of false taciturnity. But there are reasons why it is more easy to fall with the tongue than in thought or in action, at least to fall more mischievously and with less advertence, so as to leave more on the soul for which an account may remain to be given. Our thoughts are indeed more multitudinous than our words, as our words are more multitudinous than our actions, and we are always thinking, though we are not always speaking. But when we speak, we have others by us to whom we speak, and thus we can injure others as well as ourselves, and also their presence often acts as a temptation, or again as a cause of forgetfulness of what we are saying. The great faults of the tongue, detraction, lying, duplicity, contentiousness, boasting, the betrayal of secrets, scurrility, imprudence, irreverence, inopportuneness, and the like, are all the results of dangers which do not meet us when we are alone, at least not in so great a degree as when we are in company, and the mere enumeration, and much more the careful consideration, of these faults is enough to make us see the very constant dangers in which the careless use of the gift of speech places us. Our intercourse one with another for a single day brings us across a thousand perils of this sort. On the other hand it must be added that, as the tongue is the great instrument by means of which we act as beings placed



by God in society, for the practice of a thousand virtues, and for the carrying out of His good purposes for the advancement of the truth and the discharge of our duties of charity to Him, it cannot be but that the right use of the tongue is almost the most powerful instrument which we possess for giving Him glory in our social life. The dangers of the unguarded tongue are not in any way greater than the opportunities of merit and of spiritual advancement which are open to those who know rightly how to speak.

If we turn to the writers who have treated of this subject, and ask them what are the particular dangers and characteristics of the idle tongue in the most specific sense of the words, as they denote one among the many faults which can be committed by that unruly member, we find, in the first place, that many of the saints have seemed inclined to give what seems a severe definition of idleness of words. For they have seemed to include under that definition anything that is not serious, profitable, useful in itself, and even what is good in itself, but inopportune, or without profit at the moment, or to the person to whom it is spoken. Many of the rules laid down by the saints are made for the use of religious communities, and seem to require even an explicit goodness in the aim or intention of the speaker. But, at the same time, we find the saints admitting largely such intentions as the evidencing of sympathy, the conciliation of friendship, the recreation of any one who is ill in body or mind, innocent relaxation, and the like, as taking the words spoken out of the category of condemnation. When these interpretations are duly considered, it does not appear that the saints of God have been too severe in their denunciations of idle words.

The reasons which are given for the doctrine are chiefly four. The first is the consideration of the holi-

ness and responsibility of speech, which is drawn from these words of our Lord. And surely it is enough to understand them in their simple meaning in order to gain the highest idea of the carefulness to which we are bound in this respect by what we owe to our own souls and to the perpetual indwelling of the Holy Ghost, which is the privilege of Christians, when we remember how easy it is to do what St. Paul calls in one of his epistles, 'grieving the Holy Spirit of God.' The next consideration is that of the extreme danger of passing from merely idle words to what are called scurrilous, or uncharitable, or displeasing to God on some other ground, of making ourselves, therefore, guilty of some one or other of those faults of the tongue already enumerated. 'As a city that lieth open and is not compassed with walls, so is a man that cannot refrain his own spirit in speaking.'<sup>2</sup> If, as our Lord says, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and if, as He also says, the heart of man is full of all that long catalogue of iniquities, it is almost impossible but that where there is much talk there should not be wanting sin. The third evil of idle words consists in their effect upon the soul, in obscuring the conscience, in extinguishing compunction, in dissipating the spirit of devotion, in destroying fervour and recollection, interior peace, and the whole state of mind which is required for prayer. This is one of the reasons for the strict observance of the rule of silence in religious communities, for it is impossible, without that rule, to preserve the spirit of prayer, even though the inmates of those communities are not persons generally in great danger of sinning grievously with their tongue. There is no doubt a penitential reason for this carefulness of observance, but even without the idea of reparation it would be necessary, for the sake of prayer,

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xxv. 28.



to insist on silence. In the same way, the frivolous conversation of people of the world is incompatible with prayer. And the last head of these evils is to be found in the waste of time which is thus incurred, whereas there is no gift of the kind more precious, and the loss of which is more utterly irremediable.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

##### *The Sign of the Prophet Jonas.*

St. Matt. xii. 38—42 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 57.

WE have seen that the calumny of the Scribes and Pharisees against the miraculous works of our Lord may be considered as marking a point in the history at which the malignity of His enemies was forced to manifest itself in a most reckless way, on account of the splendour of the evidences by which His mission was attested and of the great influence which those evidences won for Him in the minds of the people. The iniquity of these enemies of His was mounting up to its full height, and it was soon to lead to great changes in His manner of action in public. We find at the same point of the history another indication of their malice, of which the first Evangelist has taken especial notice, and which appears, like the calumny about Beelzebub, to have grieved our Lord very painfully. This was the demand for a sign, as if the whole course of the Providential witness which had accompanied His preaching was to go for nothing.

‘Then some of the Scribes and Pharisees answered him saying : Master, we would see a sign from Thee.

Who answering said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of the Prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.' This is the direct answer made by our Lord to this insulting proposal, for it was certainly a mark of great levity and insolence to come to Him at that time, in the very midst, as it seems, of His preaching in Galilee, which was continually and daily attested by miracles, and ask Him to work one at their choice and bidding, as if they were seekers for truth, and ready to accept evidence if they could find it. We shall see presently the significance of the one sign which our Lord promised them, and its reference to the words which He had spoken, many months before this time, in the Temple on the occasion of the first purgation of the holy precincts from the profanation which had become so common in them. On that occasion also He had been asked for a sign of the authority with which He acted, and He had replied by telling them to destroy the Temple and He would in three days build it up again—words which St. John tells us were intended by our Lord to refer to the temple of His Body, which they were to destroy, and which was to rise again from the dead [after the interval named by Him. This then is the sign which our Lord now says shall be given to them, and no other. What He then spoke of is the same sign as that which is here called the sign of the prophet Jonas.

The Sacred Scriptures of the Jews contain several instances in which miraculous signs had been given by God for the authentication of some particular revelation or commands made in His name. One of the most signal instances of this is the case of Moses, who said to God,



when he was first commissioned to go as messenger to the Israelites in Egypt, that they would not believe his statement that the Lord had appeared to him. Then God made him cast his rod on the ground, and it became a serpent, which Moses was then commanded to take by the tail, on which it became once more a rod. Then again Moses was told to put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out it was leprous as snow. Then again he was told to put it back, and it became again like the rest of his flesh. And, if the Israelites would not believe these two signs, he was to take the water of the river and pour it out on the dry land, and it would become blood. On the arrival of Moses in Egypt he wrought these signs in the presence of the ancients of the people, and they believed his mission on the strength of them.<sup>1</sup> On other occasions signs were vouchsafed to other saints of the Old Testament, as to Gideon, to Manoe the father of Samson, to Samuel in the presence of the people when he 'cried unto the Lord and the Lord sent thunder and rain' at a time of the year when such things were altogether unusual.<sup>2</sup> So again the same kind of sign was given to Elias when his life was sought by Ochozias, and when the Prophet said, 'If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven,' and the rest.<sup>3</sup> In the same way when Ezechias wished for a sign of the cure which had been promised him by Isaias, the shadow on the sundial of Achaz was made to return back ten degrees.<sup>4</sup> These are instances which serve to show that the requiring a sign was not in itself an unheard of thing, or a thing that could be always worthy of censure. On the famous occasion mentioned by Isaias in his seventh chapter, Achaz had been directed

<sup>1</sup> Exodus iv. 2—9, 30, 31.

<sup>2</sup> Judges vi. 17, 37—40; xiii. 20; 1 Kings xii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> 4 Kings i. 10.

<sup>4</sup> 4 Kings xx. 11.

by the Prophet to ask a sign 'to the depth of Hell, or unto the height above,' and he had been censured for refusing to ask for such a sign. Thus, in the case before us, there must have been special reasons for the severe language of our Lord with regard to the asking for a sign, and some special malice in these Scribes and Pharisees who made the petition.

On examining the instances given above, and others like them, we find that when the signs were vouchsafed and even offered in these cases, it was when the matter revealed or enjoined was something new and particular, of which there had been no prophecies or warnings beforehand, and when, so to say, the persons who were addressed by angels or in other ways, would have had no reason for believing what was said to them in the name of God, unless some sign were specially allowed. Thus it was most natural that Moses should demand a sign which might assure him that he was in truth deputed by God for the great work with which his name was to be for ever connected, a sign which might also convince the people to whom he was sent of the truth of his mission. The signs given by Moses were necessary, and there was no other evidence before the people of the truths which were thus attested. The same may be said of the other cases—there was a special occasion, a call to some great work or exertion, the promise of some sudden deliverance, and the like, and it was but reasonable that those who were called on to undertake the work should have some special manifestation to assure them that the message came from God. Nor, on the other hand, could it be said that the mission of our Lord, for which these captious cavillers required a sign, had not been authenticated by God by the most conspicuous evidence. His mission was no new thing, for it had been prophesied and prepared for from the



beginning of the world. It was a mission for which all devout students of the Scriptures ought to have been ready, and for which the whole system of the Mosaic law and the Levitical priesthood was as much a preparation as the prophecies themselves, or the personal types which had been scattered so profusely along the whole course of the history of the chosen people. All the prophets and the law bore witness to Him, and, when He had begun to preach and to claim the allegiance of the nation as the Divine Messenger for whom they had been so constantly taught to look out, the Providence of His Father, as has been repeatedly pointed out in this work, had arranged a whole cycle of proofs of various kinds, by which whatever further evidence might be requisite would be abundantly supplied. These evidences had been urged solemnly on the attention of the Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem, whose emissaries these objectors were, on the occasion of the second of the Paschs at which He had been present, when He had so signally claimed their homage by the act of power and authority which He had done when He had healed the impotent man at the pool on the Sabbath Day. Our Lord had then spoken to them of the evidence afforded to His mission by the witness of St. John Baptist, by the voice of His Father, by the miracles which He wrought, as well as by the writings and institutions of their great Prophet Moses, who had distinctly foretold Him. Under such circumstances the asking for a sign, which implied that no sign or evidence had as yet come home to them, was, as has been said, insolent in the highest degree. It was asking God to prove something which He had already proved in the most abundant manner, it was to imply that the proofs which He had chosen were insufficient for them, and it was to show that their state of mind and heart was

such, that no amount of evidence would touch them. No sign that God could vouchsafe to them would be greater in its cogency as evidence to our Lord than those signs which they had rejected. To address fresh signs to them would be to address Divine manifestations to persons who were certain to reject them, on account of their own want of the right dispositions for accepting them. For signs fall unheeded on the eyes of those who have already determined to see in them no evidence at all, who have already made up their minds, and even shown by their language that they had made up their minds, to reject them. Let them be ever so conspicuous and overwhelming in their evidence to honest minds, they could have no effect on men who had already declared that the dispossessions of the evil spirits by our Lord were the results of a league between Him and Satan. On two of the occasions in the Gospel history on which this demand for a sign is mentioned, one by St. Matthew and the other by St. Luke, it is remarkable that the calumny about Beelzebub preceded immediately the request for a sign.<sup>5</sup>

It has already been said, moreover, that it was contrary to our Lord's uniform practice to work a sign simply as a sign. The only occasion on which He might seem to have done this is the cursing of the barren fig-tree, but that miracle was a parable as well as a miracle, and must be taken in close connection with His description of the Synagogue under the figure of a fig-tree which would not bear fruit. So also, perhaps, it might be said of the miracle of His walking on the waters, but that also was a miracle which had a most deep parabolic significance, and it was certainly intended for the consolation of the Apostles who were its witnesses. The miracles of our Lord were always works of mercy,

<sup>5</sup> St. Matt. xii. 38 ; St. Luke xi. 29.



symbolizing the character of His work in the world, and the far greater spiritual miracles which He was continually performing in the souls of men. This characteristic of the miracles of our Lord has always been the mark of the great work in the world which has been done by the Church after Him. The signs of the kind which would have satisfied these Scribes and Pharisee, or rather, of the kind which they seem to have desired, would have been merely signs and nothing more, such as the change of the rod in the hand of Moses into a serpent, or the thundering at a time of year when thunder was unusual, or the sending down fire from heaven, or the return of the shadow of the index on the sundial. It seemed most trivial to ask for signs of this kind, at the time when those who asked were shutting their eyes to the most magnificent witness on the part of God to the very truths for which they required such evidence as that of which they spoke. And this answer our Lord made to them on a similar occasion a little later on, when He answered them that they could say in the evening that the sky was red and therefore the weather would be fair, or if the sky was red in the morning, they could say that a storm was coming, and yet they could not discern the signs of the times.

‘An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the Prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale’s belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.’ For the Resurrection of our Lord from the grave was the greatest of all the miracles, and not only the greatest in itself, but the appointed sign by which God had determined to confirm the truth of the Gospel for all time. It was this to which the Apostles were appointed in a special manner to bear witness, and we find this

the one great assertion made by them in the Acts as the foundation of their whole teaching, that He had risen from the dead the third day. St. Paul speaks of it in this manner in a score of places, and even to the philosophers of Athens, when he spoke to them of the coming Judgment, he added that the proof which God had given of His intention to judge the world by the Man Whom He had chosen was that He had raised Him from the dead. Our Lord's words, therefore, imply that, though He will not work for them a sign at their bidding, after all the miracles which they had rejected and even imputed to the agency of Satan, still they should have a sign which they could not gainsay, and which would far transcend in brilliancy anything that they could have imagined in their demands, and that that sign should consist in the fulfilment in His own Person of the type in which the direct prophecy of Jonas had consisted, that is, in the Death of the Son of Man and His Resurrection from the grave on the third day. Our Lord uses the Jewish mode of speaking, by which the third day is that which comes the third counting the day from which the date is taken as the first, and by which a part of a day or a night counts for the day or the night of that space of twenty-four hours to which it belongs. In this way, our Lord lay in the grave a part of Friday, the whole of Saturday, and a part of Sunday. The three days are made up by the day hours of Friday which remained before nightfall, after His burial, by the day hours of Saturday, and by the day hours of the early morning of Sunday, before the sun was fully risen. And the three nights are made up by the night hours of Friday, the night hours of Saturday, before dawn and after sunset, and the night hours of Sunday before the dawn, up to the time when it was sufficiently light to be considered day.



Although our Lord says nothing in this place about the perversity of these enemies of His in not recognizing the signs of the times, as He says afterwards, it is clear that this thought was in His mind concerning them, from the words which immediately follow. For these words are very parallel to others of which we have had to speak, in which He reproached the cities in which so many of His mighty works had been done for their incredulity. The natural link of thought in the passage is supplied by the mention of the prophet Jonas, whose preaching of repentance had produced so wonderful an effect in the conversion of the Ninivites, an effect which, as far as we are told by the history, was not due to any miracles which He wrought, but simply to His preaching of the coming destruction of the city, and the working of this preaching on the consciences of the King and of his people. They were heathens and idolaters, famous for their violence and cruelty, and probably sunk deeply in moral corruption, and the preaching of Jonas lasted a very short time. And yet the result was so complete a change of heart in that vast population, as to appease the wrath of God and lead Him to spare the city from the punishment which He had commissioned Jonas to announce. The contrast between these Ninivites and the people of whom our Lord had to complain, that notwithstanding all His mighty works they were not converted, was signal indeed. It was but little that these Scribes were not converted—they had turned and were turning against Him with malice so inveterate as to involve them in all the terrible guilt of which He had just been speaking, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. ‘The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas, and behold, a greater than Jonas is here.’ Our Lord in another place says

that Jonas was a sign to the Ninivites, and it is gathered from this that, in some way or other, whether by his own statement or by that of others, the people knew his story and the wonderful deliverance from death which was its chief feature. Thus the resemblance between the two signs is made more complete. The resurrection, so to call it, of Jonas, was the evidence of the truth of the mission by which he was ordered to proclaim the approaching destruction of the city, as the resurrection of our Lord was to be the great evidence of the truth of the mission by which He was sent to bring about and to preach the salvation of the whole world, a mission which He handed on to His Church to continue in His Name.

Our Lord had as yet another example of readiness in receiving Divine truths on the part of those who have been brought up far away from the knowledge of revelation, which is perhaps still more striking than the conversion of the Ninivites. For marvellous as that conversion was, and as far as we know unparalleled in history, there was still at the bottom of the hearts of these poor heathen the common gift of conscience, the sense of sin and of the coming judgment, to which a preacher of penance can always appeal with some hope of success and fruit. But it is more striking when those who come readily to the teaching of the truth are not, as it were, driven by the remorse of conscience, or by the fear of chastisement from the unknown Judge Whose shadow rests as a terrible threat on the souls of so many who are yet but very little instructed about Him and about their own relations to Him. The Queen of the South, of whom our Lord next speaks, was young and prosperous and wealthy, and in the full possession of her royal state and dignity, and if she was attracted to the Wise King of whose name the whole Eastern world



was full, it was not by anything so much as by her desire to learn and to be guided and made partaker of his wisdom. Her coming was a spontaneous act, and her rich presents were the marks of her devotion and admiration, not the gifts of any policy or any fear. She stands out in the history to all time, as the type of the generous noble soul in search of wisdom, valuing it at its true price, and caring for nothing in comparison with it. She is an anticipation of the blessed visitors to the cradle of our Lord at Bethlehem, the wise and noble Kings who came so far in their grand simplicity of faith, to honour the new-born Light of the world, at the time when His own people knew Him not or cared not for Him.

‘The Queen of the South shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here.’ These words repeat once more the lesson which had already been proposed by our Lord when He spoke of the faith of the centurion at Capharnaum as greater than any He had found in Israel, and had said, that many should come from the East and the West and sit down in the Kingdom of God with the patriarchs, while the children of the kingdom were to be cast out into the exterior darkness. For there are always dangers which accompany the possession of great spiritual opportunities, and the ultimate decision of the judgment of God, in any particular case, will be guided, not so much by the advantages or disadvantages which men have had, as by their use or neglect of those advantages. And as there are always in the Kingdom of God, that is, within the range of those special favours which are the privilege of those who are the heirs of the covenant with Him, whether of old in the synagogue or in Christian times

in the Catholic Church, many souls who are instances of the great power of the means of grace, because they have cooperated faithfully with the blessings which they have received, so also there are always, in the same blessed kingdom, many and many souls who have made no account of their blessings, and who, from their mere familiarity with the externals of religion and with the truths of revelation, are more difficult to move to true repentance and devotion than others who have never before heard of them. And when, as in the case of these Scribes and Pharisees, there is added to carelessness and indifference the far blacker quality of hostility to the truth or to the law of God, which results from pride, an evil life, worldliness, ambition, the love of domination and influence, and the desire to rise to the highest ranks in the hierarchy, qualities which can hardly exist in the soul without a good deal of jealousy or fear of the success or pre-eminence of others who may be considered by such persons as rivals in the same line as themselves, then there seems to be scarcely any length to which poor human souls may not be led in the way of opposition to good or direct promotion of evil.

But our Lord is speaking rather of the danger of not listening to the call of grace, whether it be a call to repentance and amendment of life, or a call to higher things than the soul has yet known. Humility and simplicity are the essential qualities for the closing with the overtures of Divine grace, and when these are wanting, men may live in the full blaze and noon of the truth, and yet their souls may not be opened to one single ray of heavenly illumination. And, on the other hand, there will always be among men those who, by the circumstances of their position, birth, country, education, associations, and the like, are far from the opportunities which seem to be so necessary for the conversion or the



illumination of the soul, in whom, notwithstanding, God sees the precious pearl of a humble and simple spirit, and these He will convert by the words of a single sermon, or the passing remark of an acquaintance, or by a momentary glance at a book taken up by chance, and He will lead them along the path to perfection and intimate knowledge of Himself without let or hindrance or delay. And when the great day of the manifestation of all things comes at last, and men are confronted one with another in the presence of their Judge, and with the full light of that perfect revelation of all secret things, to inform them of the true character of the dealings of God with man and of man with God, then it will be seen without concealment or the possibility of mistake that all excuse for those who have turned away from God is cut off, by the presence there by their side, of thousands who have had fewer and lesser opportunities of light and of grace, and yet have so faithfully used what they had as to have won the crowns which the others by their own wilfulness have forfeited.

There is something also remarkable about the comparison which is suggested by the words of our Lord between the evidence and the Person witnessed to by the evidence, in the respective cases of which He speaks. He says that the men of Ninive and the Queen of the South will put the men of that generation to shame, because, as He says, a greater than Jonas and a greater than Solomon is here. These words imply that the men of His generation had far more evidence to lead them to believe in Him than the men of Ninive in Jonas, or the Queen of the South to make herself the disciple of Solomon. And, indeed, it is very obvious that so it was, for the men of Ninive could only have heard at second hand of the miracle by which Jonas had been saved from death, and the fame of Solomon

was after all only that of a very wise and powerful King. On the other hand, the miracles by which our Lord's mission was attested, were witnessed by the men of His generation, and they were so numerous and magnificent as to leave no room for cavil or doubt. But He puts the contrast rather on the dignity of the Person in the several cases, that is, of Himself in the one case and of Jonas or Solomon on the other. For no prophet or king could be compared in dignity to the Incarnate Son of God. In this respect the words of this passage are not identical in import with those others of which they remind us, in which our Lord had said of Tyre and Sidon, and of Sodom and Gomorrha, that if the mighty works which had been done in the cities of Galilee had been wrought in those famous seats of every vice, their inhabitants would have done penance long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Thus we come to the truth that the men who witnessed the preaching of our Lord in Galilee and in Judæa had something more than the signs themselves to force on them the duty of repentance and faith. That is, they had the truth brought home to them, if they had but had eyes to see it, that the Person to Whom all these marvellous things bare witness was, as He claimed to be, the Incarnate God.



## CHAPTER V.

### *The Returning Devil.*

St. Matt. xii. 43—45 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 57.

OUR Lord has still more to say to the men with whom He was dealing, who unhappily represented, only too faithfully, the general character of the generation to which He was sent, than what was contained in the warning which He had already given them, by comparing them unfavourably with the repentant Ninivites and with the Queen of the South, who had come so far to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Their case was worse than this. It was not only that they had failed to avail themselves of the opportunities which God had afforded them, and so had forfeited the crowns which they might have won. They had gone far backwards instead of advancing, and their state was now far worse than it had been before the great privileges of the Gospel had been offered to them. So it always is, according to that saying of which we have just spoken, ‘he that is not with Me is against Me.’ There is no neutrality in the war between God and Satan, and the ground that is not gained by the one side is occupied by the other. The offer of great opportunities does not leave men as it found them—they are either better for having closed with it, or they are worse for having rejected it. It is this truth which our Lord now sets before these reckless enemies of the truth, and He does this in a manner which might of itself have made them tremble. He takes their own calumny as the

ground of an illustration, and then He applies this illustration to themselves. They had been scoffing at the dispossessions of the demoniacs, and imputing the undoubted power there manifested to diabolical agency. The purport of our Lord's illustration is to put them in the place of the poor souls who have been thus delivered, and to warn them that they are incurring the danger of a renewal of the power of the devil over them in a far more terrible form than before. But the application of the parable to themselves does not come till the very last word, so that their attention may have been engaged in the illustration without a suspicion that it was to be turned against themselves.

‘And when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return to my house from whence I came out. And he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there, and the last state of that man is made worse than the first. So shall it be also to this wicked generation.’ This illustration is called a parable, but it is in truth a simple statement of what really takes place, though there are a few expressions in it which are figurative, as when the soul into which the devils enter is called the house from which the first spirit had been cast forth. But there is no reason for thinking that our Lord does not intend to describe the actual process, by which wicked men, who have been once delivered from the bondage of the devil, are again allowed to fall under his influence, an influence which in such cases becomes more powerful and deadly than before.

The first point in this description is what our Lord tells us takes place when the unclean spirit has been cast out of a man. ‘He walketh through dry places, seeking



rest, and findeth none.' He is driven forth from the haunts of men, for he cannot enter them without permission, a permission which is granted to him generally on account of the sins or the carelessness of men whom he desires to infest. As we see in the instance of the legion of devils, of which we shall soon have to speak, the chief fear of the devils is to be cast out entirely into the abyss, and not allowed to molest men, and the place which they are allowed to make, as it were, more their own than any other part of the world, is the wild dreary desert, the land without water, in which the habitation of man is almost impossible. In this inhospitable region the devil is described as roaming up and down, like a beast of prey in search of its food and unable to satisfy its hunger, 'seeking rest and finding none.' Rest indeed and peace those enemies of God can never find, for all eternity, nor are they ever free from torments which make rest impossible. But they have a kind of miserable rest, in comparison to the torments of their loneliness, when they are forced to prey as it were on themselves, and this comparative rest consists in the opportunities of doing mischief, and venting their hatred for God on His other creatures, and especially on man. This occupation feeds their malice, gives them something to do outside themselves, and injures God and His creatures, either for time or for eternity. The devils are incapable of joy, but what is nearest to joy in their case is the capacity of doing harm, and the leave to exercise this power. And thus, as our Lord tells us, the thought of the soul or body from which he has been ejected occurs to the evil spirit. Perhaps, even if he be not permitted to invade some one who has not before been under his power, there may have been so much ingratitude or carelessness or negligence on the part of the man from whom he has been cast out, as to provoke God into permitting him once

more to resume his power there. And it is a wonderful thought which is here suggested to us by our Lord, that those who have been signally delivered from the power of Satan by a special act of the mercy of God, may be in more danger from his machinations than others over whom he has not before had power, if they do not show more than usual gratitude, more than common diligence and watchfulness in God's service. For in this, as in other cases, the particular mercies of God bring with them a special debt of loving gratitude and correspondence with grace, and it is not at all a thing unknown in the annals of the Church, that persons who have been vouchsafed even very remarkable favours on the part of God, have afterwards fallen lower than others, on account of their want of appreciation of their singular debt of thankfulness to His mercy.

‘I will return into my house from whence I came out.’ It is not that the evil spirits have power to go whither they choose, but our Lord is describing the process summarily, and not in all its details. And, when the evil one is made to speak as if he had the power to do what he cannot do without the express permission of God, he is only described as using language such as he always uses, the language of arrogance and lying, as when Satan ventured to tell our Lord Himself that he was the master of the world, and could give all its splendours and glories to any one whom he chose, without saying that he was allowed to do in this respect just as much as God saw fit to permit to him and no more. Our Lord is describing the case of persons in whom God sees fit to permit the return of the evil spirit, on account of their own need of further chastisement, and He does not mean that in every case of dispossession the same process takes place. ‘And coming, he findeth it empty and swept and garnished.’ These three words describe



each a step in the preparation of a house for a new guest or master. It must first be emptied of all other occupants, or there will be no room for him ; then it must be at least made clean from dust and dirt and any other impediments to habitation, and lastly it must be furnished and done up, the ordinary utensils and furniture necessary for dwellers must be supplied, and the whole decorated and adorned, in proportion to the dignity of the new comer and the means that exist for making it fit for him. Dwelling is impossible if the house is already filled and occupied, it is uncomfortable and miserable if the house has not even been swept, and it is unbecoming a person of any position if the furniture and other necessities have not been provided.

It is not difficult to see what must answer to these three things in the case of the human soul, into which the devil who has once been cast out is desirous once again to enter. In the first place the house must be empty, that is, it must not be occupied by the Holy Spirit of God indwelling in it by His grace and His presence. The idle empty heart is the house, with its door wide open for Satan to enter in, while the souls in which God dwells, and which are full of thoughts and affections which belong to his service, and busied in holy occupations or in the works of their vocation, have themselves filled, so as to leave no room by which the evil one can make his approaches. If idleness, and emptiness, and the absence of the grace of God, make the occupation of the soul possible to the evil one, the second process, which is what our Lord speaks of as sweeping, must be something which removes impediments and hindrances and useless encumbrances, and all that may be represented by the dust and dirt and rubbish which the image suggests to the mind. That is, the soul in which this hellish occupant is to make his home must be free from

virtuous habits, and good actions, and the remains of good deeds, which ordinarily leave behind themselves the disposition to other similar actions, tendencies and traditions, as it were, such as are to be found in persons who have been well brought up, and who, for some time at least, have remained faithful to the education they have received and to the holy habits in which they have been trained. We see persons who have even fallen into sin keep up a sort of habit of prayer, or of outward conformity to the customs of good people. They will still carry about their rosaries and wear their scapulars, and be seen at Mass on days of obligation, and although their service to God does not go much deeper than the exterior, still it is something which is not altogether worthless, for it puts them into the occasion of seeing or hearing what may bring them back to a better mind. They have not entirely broken with their religion, and there is yet some outward conformity on which hereafter a more solid structure of good may be built. This may be so much dust, as far as its intrinsic value is concerned, but still it must be removed to make the soul a convenient receptacle for the proud enemy of God. In too many cases the returning demon finds even this swept away. And then there remains the further process, the installation in the soul of what may answer to the furniture and garnishment of a house for this new master—habits of positive sin, bad connections, the freedom of the passions, licence of the tongue, open violations of the law of God indulged in without scruple, accumulated sins and evil ways already in possession, which may make the inspection of the soul by the evil one a happy and pleasurable task, for he will find there everything that he can require for a re-establishment of his dominion and for a long and peaceable possession. It may seem to us a marvel that God should allow the enemies of His honour



and the haters of His law to set themselves up as lords in the souls and bodies of His creatures whom He has made, and for whom He has been willing to take an inferior nature and die on the Cross. But there is something still more wonderful in the reckless folly and indifference to their own interests of some of these poor creatures themselves, whose management of their immortal souls is like nothing more than a continual invitation to the devils to come and take possession of them and a continual preparation to receive them if they come, as a rejoicing city receives some great deliverer or some monarch returning from victory. There is this also contained in our Lord's words, which seem framed for the purpose of signifying the part which men themselves take in fitting themselves for the habitation and dominion of the evil spirits.

‘Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is made worse than the first. So shall it be also to this wicked generation.’ These words of our Lord lift a veil from the unseen world, and show us a little of the manner in which it is governed by God, for all these things which are done by the evil spirits are done by His permission, and in consequence of His arrangements. It must be remembered that the devils are fallen angels, and that they are by nature now what God made them in the beginning. The spiritual kingdom of God was organized in a marvellous and most beautiful manner, the lower angels depending on the higher, as the highest of all immediately on God, and the natural powers of the various orders of the several hierarchies being very different, and increasing in magnificence and glory as they rose higher and higher. It is believed that some out of almost all the hierarchies fell in the revolt of

which Satan was the ringleader, and that thus there are among the fallen spirits instances of all the various gradations of natural gifts which exist also in the blessed hierarchies of the faithful Angels in Heaven. Thus among those dreadful enemies of mankind with whom our warfare is, as St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Ephesians, there are to be found spirits of almost the highest rank, as well as others. ‘For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.’<sup>1</sup> Words such as these are not used by the Apostle in vain, and without a definite purpose, and he seems to be looking into the ranks of his enemies, and discerning the very individual powers, of various grades, against which he and his companions have to fight, as a great leader might calculate as far as he could the exact force of the army arrayed against him.

It is but natural, and in accordance with the just judgments of God, that when a man has been delivered from the dominion of an evil spirit, and has again made himself worthy to become his prey, it should be permitted that in the second instance that man should be placed under the dominion and agency of spirits of evil, worse and more powerful than any that had had influence over him before. It is thought also by many of the Christian commentators that there are certain demons which are, as it were, allotted to certain particular temptations, such as those to each one of the deadly sins, as we pray in the Litanies, to be delivered “from the spirit of fornication,” and in the same way there may be a special spirit of avarice, or of envy, or of anger, and the rest. Moreover, our Lord’s words about the kingdom of Satan seem to imply, as has been said, that there is some kind of

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. vi. 12, seq.



tyrannical and wicked and cruel rule among the evil spirits, probably the remains of that subordination which prevails in Heaven, and which regulated the relations of these false spirits with their brethren and with one another while they were as yet innocent. And it seems that, although they are full of hate one to another as to themselves, still they league together and submit willingly to discipline, for the sake of carrying on their war against God and man, much in the same way that all the sects outside the Catholic Church, however discordant among themselves, will unite and concert measures and false charges against her in the common interest of all. And as the activity of the evil spirits and their sleepless malice sometimes puts to shame the comparative indolence and carelessness of the servants of God upon earth, so also do these wicked enemies sometimes read us a lesson of mutual harmony and combination. While there are jealousies on earth as to who shall do this or that good work, jealousies which sometimes do not stop short of the prevention of much-needed good—for some men would rather not see it done, if it is not to be done by themselves—the evil servants of Satan combine, and are glad to see their work shared and carried on by others, not wishing to do it all themselves so long as it is done by some one. It is impossible to imagine that there is any love between these fallen spirits, or that they have to one another any feelings but those of hatred and envy and ill-will, but they are too deeply devoted to their wretched task of marring the works and the designs of God to allow these feelings to interfere with the object which they all have in common.

‘And they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is made worse than the first.’ It is not difficult to understand how this is so. In the case of the far less dangerous domination of the evil one, which

consists in the giving over of a soul to sin, which may be considered as representing in a manner the phenomena of possession, strictly so called, of which our Lord is speaking, it is well known from experience that one sin, freely indulged in, leads to another, and that the kinds of sin, such as those which are commonly called the deadly sins, are very kindred in character, the one opening the door to the other in many cases, if not in all. There is the same kindred character about the virtues, meekness leads to purity, humility to charity, and so on. So with the great sins, pride and anger and envy, and lust and gluttony and slothfulness and avarice. There is a family relationship between them, and the soul that is delivered over to one may only lack the opportunity or the temptation to become the slave of the rest. It is therefore very much in accordance with our ordinary experience that, in the more dreadful case of demoniacal possession, the presence of one evil spirit should be the introduction of others, and our Lord's words give us a terrible picture of the rapidity with which in the judicial providence of God, the process advances, for He does not say that one devil introduces one other, but seven others, and these more wicked than himself. And it is only reasonable that in the ordinary course of such possessions and obsessions, the state of the poor victim should be worse and more hopeless, in proportion to the number and malice of the demons who are allowed by God to haunt and rule him. We find in the instance which occurs later on in the history of the boy out of whom the Apostles could not cast the devil, that there are some cases of possession more difficult to relieve than others, and the reason given by our Lord is that prayer and fasting were required in the case of which He spoke. And if there are some kinds of evil spirits more powerful in this way



than others, it is easy to see that the number of the devils possessing any one person may cause the same relative difficulty in his case.

‘So shall it be also to this wicked generation.’ Our Lord is speaking of the wickedness of the Jews, who were opposing Him, and it is not difficult to see in the subsequent history of their opposition the proof of the truth of His prediction. We may notice that if the image is to be applied to them in its completeness, it must be considered that in a certain sense they had been first delivered from a devil who afterwards returned to them with others worse than himself. And certainly it is clear, that the whole of the marvellous Providence of God in His addresses to them, first by the preaching of St. John Baptist and then by that of our Lord Himself, was a dispossession of the devil of ignorance, and blindness, and torpor, as to spiritual things, under whose dominion they had been, and that the process of binding of the strong armed man before the despoiling of his goods, of which our Lord had just been speaking, was in a most true sense a casting out of a devil from the generation for whose benefit all this was done. We are not bound to find the exact counterpart of the phenomena of dispossession in this case, for the words of our Lord only imply of necessity a parallelism between the two cases. But in the history of their treatment of Him we can well discern the successive stages of a spiritual hardening and worsening, which corresponds completely to the description of the man again possessed by the devil who had been cast out. The preaching of St. John found these men sunk in hypocrisy and evil living, while their position and calling obliged them to maintain a decent and even a religious exterior in the eyes of men, and, what was still more fatal, to be constantly occupied with holy functions and with the

guidance and instruction of others, while all the time their hearts were full of uncleanness. The general state of the people was probably not very much higher than that of their teachers, setting aside the peculiar malice of the hypocrisy imposed on the latter by the necessities of the case. The preaching of penance had been the providential means of healing for them all, ministers of religion as well the mass of the population, and in a large number of instances it had been successful, especially in the case of the multitude as distinguished from the Scribes and Pharisees, under which names, it must be always remembered, our Lord and the Evangelists speak of the ecclesiastical order in general, as if not wishing to bring out too prominently the fact that the great opponents of the Gospel were the priests, and above all the ecclesiastical rulers.

Thus it might very truly be said that the devil had been cast out, and the door opened for the enlightenment and guidance unto peace of which the blessed Zachary speaks in his Canticle. It is a part of the providential ruling of God that He deals with nations and communities as units, and that the action and policy of the rulers is allowed to affect the mass of the people under their guidance, as far as regards public and common responsibility, and the manner in which such communities are visited with punishment or reward in this world. And now, in the case of the Jews, the leaders were following a line of policy with regard to our Lord which verified, in their case, the description given here of the ever-increasing evilness of the state of the man of whom our Lord speaks, while the people, as a mass, were more or less distinctly following in the wake of their leaders, at least so far as to become very indifferent and inattentive to the Gospel teaching. But



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in the near future our Lord could foresee far worse things for them than mere indifference and dulness, bad as those sins might be in the case of persons so highly favoured. It has already been explained how it was impossible for persons in the position of the Jewish rulers and their subordinates to maintain an attitude of neutrality with regard to our Lord and His teaching. They must either close with Him and make Him their Lord and Master, or they must oppose Him, and the gradual unfolding of the magnificent plan of God, of which He was the administrator, made their opposition necessarily more and more fierce and bitter, day after day. He kept out of their way as much as possible for Him, He retired before their malignity, He gave them every chance of coming to a better mind. It is probable that if we could trace out the whole of His gracious condescension and forbearance in their regard, we should have before us a history very similar to that of His dealings with the apostate Apostle Judas. But they were carried on by a fatal necessity from which thing they could only deliver themselves by doing the one they had determined not to do, that is, fairly to admit the claims which were supported by so many Divine attestations. Their course is very constantly repeated in that of the heretical leaders and teachers of modern times, who will let themselves be driven to every shift of calumny and misrepresentation, rather than look in the face the evidence for the Catholic Church. Such men have been known, at the time they have been teaching Catholic doctrines and introducing Catholic practices which their own community had rejected and proscribed, and which they themselves have solemnly abjured as a condition of their office, to tell persons who were desirous of going one step further than themselves in the direction of Catholic Unity, that to acknowledge

the claims of the Church would be to commit this very sin against the Holy Ghost of which these Scribes and Pharisees were now guilty.

The Jewish rulers went on, then, from indifference to opposition, from opposition to hostility, from hostility to persecution, from persecution to calumny of the blackest kind, from calumny to conspiracy against our Lord's life, to the subornation of false witnesses, and so on, to the bribery of Judas and all the enormous sins which make up their part in the story of the Passion. The great triumph and miracle of the Resurrection, the sign of the Prophet Jonas, of which our Lord here speaks, fell on them without producing the slightest effect, and as they had been the persecutors of our Lord so also were they the persecutors of the Apostles and the Church of Jerusalem after Him. The history of that Church was a history of the most intense suffering, and it is easy to understand how extremely important it may have been for its rulers to exercise the greatest possible prudence in not offending more than was absolutely necessary the prejudices of their fellow-countrymen. This truth throws much light on the history of St. Paul. At last the malignity of that generation of Jews was turned against themselves, they broke out into rebellion against the all-powerful Roman Empire, and the last scenes of the history are scenes of internal discord, barbarity, and atrocity in every crime, as well as of suffering and chastisement, such as the world never saw before or since.

There are some instructive comments on this passage among the writings of the Catholic expounders of Scripture which may be referred to in a few words before we leave this subject. Some of these writers inquire how far it is true that the present state of the Jewish nation, as regards the sins of which it makes itself guilty,



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is worse than the state of the same nation in the time when our Lord was thus treated by its rulers. It is not necessary to the intelligence of what is here said by our Lord to consider that He means to imply that the worsening of the state of that generation was to be continued of necessity to the end of time, when it is believed that the Jews will be converted to the faith. He speaks of that generation, which signifies in a broad sense, the nation up to the time of its final punishment for the sin of the Crucifixion. Since that time the Jews have often been a persecuted race, and it would be hard to find them guilty of the same kind of enormous crimes of which the punishment was exacted at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. But it must be remembered that the spiritual state, whether of a single person, or of a generation, or of a community, may be worse than before in more ways than one. It may become worse by the prevalence of a number of new sins or evil habits, as, to take the case of individuals, a young man may grow worse and worse as he becomes the victim of one vice after another, and gives up more and more all attention to the voice of his conscience. Or, again, it may become worse by the greater adhesion of the perverse will to sin in any form, as an old man may become forced by the advance of age to abandon the grosser habits of licentiousness to which he has been accustomed, only to cling with greater intensity of malice to the indulgences of which he is still capable. So, to take the case of a man misled by heresy, he may, as time goes on, find out more and more the comparative beauty of the Catholic faith and religious practice, and he may adopt, on his own authority, more and more portions of the system of the Church, and in these respects he may seem to have made and to be making progress towards the true faith

in its perfection and completeness. He may even plume himself on having made greater advances in what may be called the acclimatization of Catholic institutions on a foreign soil than those who have preceded him, and he may even point to these advances as to signs that he must be in the right path.

And yet a man in this position may be really worse and worse as time goes on, because his resistance to the authority of the Church becomes more and more intelligent, more and more conscious, more and more resolute and obstinate, and so more and more sinful and less and less excusable. And it is quite within the range of experience in a country like our own, in which God has undoubtedly been reviving, in many outside the Catholic Church, those instincts of love for her system which are the natural inheritance of all rightly baptised souls, that there should be many persons, and even bodies, or parties, who appear to draw nearer and nearer to Catholicism in a number of points of detail, whether of doctrine or of practice, while all the time they are becoming more and more hopelessly imbued with the heretical spirit, more and more resolutely determined never to submit to authority and to acknowledge the enormous sinfulness of wilful schism. In cases of this kind it may be most truly said that the last state of these men is worse than the first, because they began in ignorance, and were led on by the native beauty of the Catholic doctrine to lay aside one error after another, while at the same time they have become more and more consciously the leaders of parties and practically the founders of sects. They have tasted the sweets, miserable as they are, of personal influence over the souls of others, a temptation never more dangerous than in communities outside the Church, in which there is practically no supervision by authority of the action



of individuals. They have exchanged the comparative innocence of opponents of the Church who are not responsible for their own position, for the malignity of deliberate rebels, and even for the open hostility of calumniators of the truth. And, if this deterioration is possible in cases of this kind, where the sin consists in obstinacy of the intelligence hardened by a perverse will, which is not inconsistent with many moral virtues and great activity in good works, it must be much more easy in other cases in which the soul runs headlong in a course of immorality.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### *Our Lord and His Disciples.*

St. Matt. xii. 47—50 ; St. Mark iii. 31—35 ; St. Luke viii. 19—21 ;  
*Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 57.

THERE is a tone of severity and sternness about the whole of this teaching of our Blessed Lord, very natural indeed, when we consider the very great provocation which He was now receiving from the malice of His enemies. We have noted the occasional gentleness of His language, even in the midst of the denunciations and threats of condign punishment which were drawn from Him by the calumnies and blasphemies of which He was obliged to speak. The Evangelists close their narrative of this series of incidents with an anecdote which has a far more tender and loving character, and which serves to balance, so to say, the stern teaching concerning idle words, and the miserable blindness and obduracy of the men of that generation, very much in the same way as we have seen the teaching concerning the

rejection of the wise and prudent and the severe judgment that would be passed on the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, balanced by the rejoicing of the Sacred Heart of our Lord over the little ones whom His Father had chosen for Him, and by the most loving invitation to come to Him, addressed to all those who labour and are burthened. The reason for which the anecdote of which we are now to speak is related by the first three Evangelists seems to be clearly this, that some anecdote should be given of the intense love with which our Lord regarded those who listened to Him faithfully, just at the time when the history obliged them to relate the severe language which had been forced from our Lord by the malignant and blasphemous calumnies of the Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem. It is clear that at this time He had much consolation in those who followed Him faithfully, and that He seized the occasion afforded Him of expressing it.

It is not absolutely certain that the anecdote of which we are now to speak took place at the very same time with the teaching of which the close has just been related, namely, the teaching on the subject of the return of the evil spirit to the man out of whom he had been cast. But it seems most probable that so it is. St. Matthew begins his account with the words, 'As He was yet speaking to the multitudes,' as if for the purpose of directly connecting the narrative with the passage immediately preceding it. In ordinary cases this would be enough to settle the connection beyond all doubt, but this Evangelist is often so abrupt in his transitions, as they appear to us with his work before us as one continuous whole, that we may be sometimes misled in thinking that he intends immediately to connect the several paragraphs, so to call them, of which his Gospel



is really made up, and which may have been originally written by him as memoranda of incidents which were not closely connected in point of time. It is evident that the great point on which St. Matthew means to insist is that what is about to be related took place on an occasion when our Lord was teaching the people, and had not yet finished His discourse. This is the chief point in the whole anecdote, and St. Matthew might not mean more by the words with which he begins than this, that the announcement as to the presence of His Blessed Mother and of His brethren was made to our Lord while He was engaged in teaching. But there is nothing, on the other hand, to make it improbable that the teaching on which He was engaged was that very teaching about the last state of the man to whom the devil had returned after being driven forth, the record of which immediately precedes the anecdote. The only thing that might make us hesitate as to this would be that the doctrine about the returning devil would belong rather to that kind of teaching which He would address to the Scribes and Pharisees than to the multitudes, made up mainly of faithful disciples of His own. He might have passed from that terrible subject to some teaching more directly practical for the crowds who were listening to Him. But it seems in any case certain that these things happened when our Lord was drawing very near to Capharnaum on His return thither, after His missionary circuit, or when He had actually just reached the city, from which He was at no great distance of time to retire, never to return to it again.

‘As He was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold His Mother and His brethren stood without, seeking to speak to Him, and standing without, sent unto Him, calling Him. And the multitude sat about, and one said to Him, Behold Thy Mother and Thy brethren

stand without seeking Thee. But He answering him that told Him, said, Who is My Mother, and who are My brethren? And looking round on them who sat about Him, and stretching forth His hand towards His Disciples, He said, Behold My Mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father Who is in Heaven, he is My brother and My sister, and My mother. My mother and My brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it.' The occurrence may have been accidental in the minds of the Blessed Mother and the brethren of our Lord, that is, they may have made their way to the place when He was teaching without any knowledge that He was so occupied, and without the least intention of interrupting Him in His discourse. But it may have been ordained in the providence of God for some gracious purpose, and it is easy to see how much we have gained by it, in the most loving declaration of our Lord of His regard for His disciples, for all who hear the word of God and do it, as well as in the lesson which is conveyed in the example here set by our Lord to all who are engaged in the work of the ministry not to let the most powerful natural ties and influences interfere with them in the slightest degree in the discharge of their sacred duties. In this respect the incident may have been ordained by God, in the same way as the beautiful incident of the lingering of our Lord in the Temple for three days, when He was of the age of twelve years, and when Mary and Joseph were allowed to remain in ignorance of the cause which had kept Him away from their company, for the sake of the lesson which His conduct was to convey for all time, with regard to the absolute independence of children in matters of Divine vocation. For it was a part of the office in the Kingdom of God of our Blessed Lady and her Spouse, to stand, in relation to our Lord, in the



position in which Christian parents are to stand in the Church to their own children, and our Lord's conduct to them is the type and model of the behaviour of Christian children to their own parents. It follows from this, that it was sometimes a part of the counsel of God that He should act with the most perfect independence of them, while it was also a part of the same Divine counsel that He should in other matters be the perfect pattern of filial obedience and reverence and humility. And as it is impossible to see the slightest ground for censure in the conduct of our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph on the occasion of the remaining of our Lord in the Temple, so also is it altogether foolish to imagine any undue importunity or self-assertion on the part of our Lady on the occasion before us.

If our Lord had just returned to Capharnaum suddenly, and if she had not as yet seen Him, that would be a sufficient reason for her desire to seek Him out at once, and it may have been permitted that He should protract His teaching more than usual, or that in some manner His engagement in teaching may have been novel at such a time. But it is also easy to suppose that there may have been some special reason for our Lady's loving anxiety to speak with Him. Such a reason may have been furnished, only too readily, by the malice of His enemies, always more powerful to hurt Him when He approached the towns in which He had been so well known, and where He must necessarily be more in the reach of the authorities, than while He was passing from place to place in the country with large multitudes following Him. The last thing we have heard of these near relations of our Lord, who are called His brethren in the Gospels, was an attempt of theirs to place Him in some secure spot for the sake of defending Him from the dangers which He seemed to court. So during His

absence from Capharnaum, they may have become aware of the intentions of His enemies against Him, intentions which, as we shall see, He had His own way of rendering futile. For as a matter of fact, He gave them the least possible opportunity of carrying out their designs. But, in the present stage of the history, His 'brethren' are pictured to us in a few graphic touches by the Evangelists, as not yet convinced of His Divine Personality, and yet most eager, with all the eagerness of the most devoted human affection, both for His safety and for the greater publicity of His teaching. Such persons would feel, so to say, a kind of property in Him, and as our Blessed Lady resided for the present with them, it is most natural that she should be with them in their attempt to see and to warn Him. Another reason also may have prompted something like anxiety on the part of His Blessed Mother, for our Lord was never satisfied with the time He spent in teaching, and though He would work His greatest miracles to save the crowd of those who followed Him from any inconveniences from their distance from their homes, He had no mercy on Himself, and was worn out with fatigue before He would send the multitudes away. Either of these causes may have been operating in the mind of our Blessed Lady, but the Evangelists do not pause to tell us how the matter really was. They were simply intent on relating the words and actions of our Lord, and they had a special intention for the consolation of the faithful, and for the admonition of apostolical men in recording the anecdote. And perhaps also those blessed historians of our Lord, living in the full recollection and tradition of His demeanour to His Mother, and of the immense honour which was paid to her in the early Church of Jerusalem, would not think it worth their while to anticipate the possible comments that might be



made to her disadvantage, in times when the glory of her presence was not so fresh in the memories even of the great mass of Christians. For it may be considered certain that, to the devout Jews of the times of our Lord and the Apostles, not only was the great figure of the promised Messiah most familiar from the prophecies, but that also by the side of that figure there was another scarcely less familiar, and scarcely less magnificent, that of the promised Mother of the holy seed, the enemy of the serpent from the beginning, the Virgin, of whose conception and child-bearing Isaias and a score of other prophets had prophesied, and that all who knew from the Sacred Scriptures the dignity of the Son would not be ignorant of the greatness of the Mother.

But whatever may have been the motives of the Blessed Mother and of these near relations of our Lord in this visit to the spot or house in which He was teaching, the important matter for us is that they came to the outskirts of the crowd, or to the door of the house, while He was still engaged in teaching the people, who were sitting round Him in a large circle, so that the little party of which our Lady was the chief could not reach Him. It was immediately known who she was, and who were her companions, and the message or tidings was carried from mouth to mouth among the crowd, till it reached our Lord. This was what it was in the counsels of God to bring about, and our Lord took the opportunity of summing up His discourse in the manner most consoling to His audience, and most instructive to all who have to follow Him in the office of teacher to all time. And no doubt if the subject matter on which He was speaking was, as seems to be implied in the words of St. Matthew, the same as that of the teaching which has last been related, it must have been a fresh joy of the Heart of our Lord to have the

occasion to close with words so full of love and tenderness. The Evangelists between them give us a complete picture, how He first looked on the crowd and then stretched out His hands to them, saying, Behold My Mother and My brethren, and St. Matthew tells us that He began by asking the question, Who is My Mother and who are My brethren? for whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in Heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.' As our Lord was so affectionate and loving and gentle and yielding in His demeanour to every one, the multitude must have been prepared to find that He would not reject the application made by His Mother and brethren in any discourteous way. But at the same time it was fitting that the right balance should be struck, between the claims of earthly and family ties on the one hand, and those of spiritual relationship on the other. It was right that our Lord should leave behind Him this doctrine in His Church, that carnal relationship is absolutely nothing by the side of the links between the teacher and His spiritual children, and the other supernatural ties which bind us one to another in His kingdom. It is as if He had said, I have no mother, no kindred, no brethren, in the merely natural order, the only ties I have are with those who hear and do the word of God and the will of God. Even His natural relation to His most Blessed Mother was but the foundation on which His spiritual bond with her was built, the natural tie between them had been at once elevated and transformed by the overwhelming gifts of grace which had fitted her for her position as His Mother, and on that first great foundation of graces another magnificent edifice had been raised, and was daily mounting up higher and higher in the sight of God, as her most perfect faithfulness to grace multiplied her merits, and as she became ever nearer and nearer to



Him in the most perfect union of her heart and thoughts and affections with His own. First, indeed, she was, and had ever been and was ever to be, with Him, but the grounds of her pre-eminent sanctity, and of His pre-eminent love for her, were grounds of spiritual conformity and not of natural relationship, and if it were true of any one that he or she who heard and did the word of God was His mother, it was true of no one half so much as of her who by nature was His Mother.

Thus, at the very time when He had been forced by the malignity of the Scribes sent down from Jerusalem to utter these awful words about the unpardonable sin and the last state of the man which was worse than the first, He was also enabled, by a seeming accident in the providence of His Father, to speak these most loving and consoling words concerning His disciples. And thus this series of instructions ended more happily than it began, for it ended in the declaration of the most tender union between Himself and those who listened to Him faithfully, whereas it had begun with the most diabolical of calumnies against Him and the most fearful words which He ever spoke against those who opposed His teaching.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *The Teaching by Parables.*

St. Matt. xiii. 1—9 ; St. Mark iv. 1—9 ; St. Luke viii. 4—8 ;  
*Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 58.

WE now come to an important point in the Ministry of our Lord, at which, in consequence, as we cannot doubt, of the malignant form which the opposition of His enemies had now taken, and of the disastrous influence of that opposition upon the people, even on the crowds who were still ready to listen to Him and who flocked to Him for the sake of the miracles of mercy which He wrought, He adopted the rule of not speaking to them in public except in the form of parables. It has been remarked, in the introductory part of this work, that it cannot be reasonably thought that our Lord had never adopted the parabolic form of instruction before this date. His whole manner of teaching, if it was not directly parabolic, was akin to that method, for He always spoke in image and figure. He never laid aside this manner of speaking, even at the very last. When He was on His way to Mount Calvary with His Cross on His shoulders, He spoke to the women of Jerusalem about the green tree and the dry. And when He appeared after His Ascension to St. Paul on the road to Damascus, He spoke to him about ‘kicking against the goads.’ If we find no direct and formal parables before this time, there are abundant instances of teaching, in which it is only the formal enunciation of the similitude that is wanting to make



them parables. Such are many parts of the Sermon on the Mount, such are the words in which, shortly before this time, He put before the Pharisee Simon the relative merits of the love shown to Him by Simon himself on the one hand, and by the blessed Magdalene on the other. And yet it is quite clear that His adoption of this method at this time had an appearance of novelty, and that it created some astonishment in the minds of the Apostles, and therefore, we may suppose, in the minds of the people themselves, that He should have so far departed from His usual method on this occasion.

We have already traced to some extent the gradual increase of reserve on our Lord's part in His public teaching. This increase was inevitable, if He was to continue to teach at all. It was made inevitable by the manner in which every word was watched by His adversaries, and, perhaps, much more, by the cause to which He Himself, as we shall see, attributed it, the gradual hardening of the hearts of His ordinary hearers. There is indeed a great difference between the bright heavenly openness of the Sermon on the Mount, and the more mournful and solemn warnings of which a great part of the Sermon on the Plain is made up. But there we find, at least, exhortations to such beautiful virtues as the forgiveness of injuries, the love of enemies, the abstention from judgment of our neighbour, and the like. If we ask ourselves what are the moral lessons which are conveyed by the series of parables on which we are now about to comment, we find indeed that these lessons relate directly to practice, for they warn us against the various hindrances to the acceptance of the Word of God. It is quite true, and must not be forgotten in the consideration now before us, that we have only a certain portion of the Parables now delivered

to the multitude. We are distinctly told by St. Mark that our Lord at this time addressed 'many such parables' to the people. But it seems natural to think that we can judge of the general import of His teaching at this time from the specimens preserved to us. They speak to us of the coming Judgment, of the rejection of the bad members of the Church, they tell us of the activity of the enemy of God and man, even in the field cultivated by the ministry of the Church, they tell us of the extreme preciousness of the graces which belong to the Kingdom of Christ. All these things are most salutary counsels. But their practical import is mainly confined to the one most momentous point, the inculcation of great diligence in hearing the Word of God and in using our opportunities of grace. It is no longer this or that special truth which is urged home, it is the one only manner in which any truth can be received with profit. And these counsels are all folded up, as it were, in the mysterious garb of parables which not every one can penetrate, nay, which, without the direct explanation which has been vouchsafed of some of them by our Lord Himself, we should have great difficulty in understanding, at least in all their details. We may well imagine that the ordinary hearers of our Lord might have been perplexed by this change in His teaching, and might have felt it more difficult than before to grasp the revelation which He came to make.

If this were indeed so, it is but a fresh confirmation of a truth regarding the dealings of God with man which has already been illustrated in this history of the Gospel teaching. The opportunities of grace and light vouchsafed to persons, or generations, or nations, are often very short. They pass away, never to return, leaving those to whom they have been addressed in some cases far better than they were before, in other cases far worse



than they were before, but not often in the same condition. Men have either accepted the message of God and been marvellously bettered thereby, or they have turned away from it and are wonderfully worsened thereby. The process of hardening and of growing darkness is not accomplished all at once, it has its stages and degrees. This is the history, not only of every presentation of the Gospel truths to generations or peoples which have never before heard of them, but of occasions with which we are in the present day much more familiar, as when to a population already Christian is given a fresh impulse to faith or devotion, by some Providential action of God which is intended to prepare men for some coming trial, to give them the opportunity of warding off some impending chastisement by penitence, or to prepare them for the reception of some great spiritual boon. At the beginning, there is a great outpouring of grace, there are miracles of conversion, many heroic deeds of self-sacrifice, many beautiful providences, making the way smooth as well as making the path clear. The minds of the devout students of God's ways and works will at once remember the great outpouring of Divine mercy which followed on, or rather accompanied, the preaching of St. John the Baptist and the first year of the Ministry of our Lord in Galilee. But these seasons of the triumph of grace were short, for St. John preached only a few months, and our Lord's first teaching in Galilee was not very much longer than the ministry of St. John. In each case the hearts of men were soon tried and the issue soon decided. While some were hesitating, others struggling with themselves, others, who had at first accepted the grace, turning back or growing lukewarm, the moment passed, the occasion ceased, the heavenly gift sped on its way elsewhere.

It seems, moreover, that these words of the Evangel-

ists are not to be understood without some restriction, drawn from the critical consideration of the remainder of their narratives. We may gather from such a consideration, that the words about not teaching them without parables apply directly to the populations of Galilee, and especially of the great cities like Capharnaum, where He had taught so much. As a matter of fact, there is no other teaching of the people in these parts recorded by the Evangelists, as publicly delivered by our Lord, after this time, which is not parabolic. He was soon to be seen no more in Capharnaum itself, and it seems certain that the greater part of the last year of His teaching was devoted to Judæa, Peræa, and Jerusalem. The teaching of which we have distinct record after this, as having taken place in Galilee,<sup>1</sup> is mainly such as the great discourse in the synagogue of Capharnaum, after the miracle of the five loaves, which is distinctly doctrinal in its character, and which seems to have been addressed to an audience of scribes or well-instructed men. And in the two earlier Gospels, in which alone this series of parables, on which we are now about to comment, is made a prominent feature, there is after this no teaching of any kind to the people except in parables, besides that which St. Matthew records as having been delivered in Peræa, on the subject mainly of what we call the 'counsels of perfection,' and that great series of instructions delivered in the Temple itself in the earlier days of the week of the Passion.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a large portion of the Gospel of St. Luke is devoted by him to a series of practical instructions later than the period at which we have now arrived, and delivered to the people, and this great series of instructions is by no means uniformly parabolical. But it has already been pointed out, in the introductory part of

<sup>1</sup> St. John vi. 25, seq.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matt. xix.—xxiii.



this work, that St. Luke is there relating incidents and instructions which belong to the Judæan, as distinguished from the Galilean Ministry of our Lord, and we may certainly gather, from the appearance in this course of teaching of so much that is not parabolical, that it was delivered to a population altogether or mainly different in its elements from that which our Lord had at that time left behind Him in Galilee.<sup>3</sup> There is a great deal in that portion of the teaching of our Lord which is a repetition of what had already been set before the people in the former scene of His labours, and it may even be thought, without any great indulgence of fancifulness, that the proportion of parabolical teaching which occurs in this series of instructions increases as time goes on, as if there also our Lord had gradually become less explicit in His direct teaching. The teaching in the Temple and perhaps elsewhere in Jerusalem, of which we have so much recorded to us in the last half of the Gospel of St. John, belongs to another category among the discourses of our Lord, because He is there mainly engaged in disputing with the Jewish doctors on matters concerning His own mission and office.<sup>4</sup> Thus we can trace in the whole Gospel narrative, taken together, the influence of this law of the gradual increase of reserve in setting forth Divine truths to those who were proving themselves unworthy of them by their negligence in receiving them, first in Galilee, and later on in Judæa itself. In each case our Lord begins with a largeness and freedom of communication, which He is afterwards compelled to restrict on account of the hardness of the hearts of those to whom He is addressing Himself. And, finally, after having taught in a more reserved way, He goes on to withdraw from them His teaching altogether.

<sup>3</sup> St. Luke ix. 51—xviii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> St. John vii. 1—xi. 54.

We see the prevalence of the same law of Providential action in all ages, as in the occasional movements of renovation and revival which God sometimes vouchsafes, either to parts of the Church in which fervour has grown cold, or to communities outside Catholic unity in which there are many good elements overgrown by falsehood and corruption. A very short time is enough for men to show what is in their hearts. If they show themselves well disposed, there is no limit to the graces which God is prepared to pour out upon them. Men are quickly tested as to what is in their hearts, how far they will let themselves be led on towards higher truths, the perception of which may involve great sacrifices, or at least require great attention and purity of heart. If they show themselves determined to remain in the false liberty of heresy and schism, the Word is withdrawn from them, and though they may manifest a considerable amount of religious activity, build churches, organize missions, and parody a dozen beautiful portions of the Catholic system, for the sake of keeping up the appearance of life, it is easy to see through the false show of foliage without fruit, and to anticipate for that community or generation the fate of the barren fig-tree. The process of illumination is stopped, the growth in spirituality is stunted. All opportunities of grace are not, indeed, withdrawn, for the Catholic Church remains, as she ever is, the witness to the truth which is addressed to all, the city set on a mountain, which cannot be hidden. But a veil descends between her and them, they lose their power of discerning the signs of the times, the Providential action in the arrangement of events around them, which is designed by God to open their eyes to the falseness of their own position, finds no response in their intelligence because their hearts are hardened, and it is not unusual for them even to turn on the messengers of



God with fresh fury, as the Jews ultimately turned upon our Lord and brought about His death.

Moreover, the Divine reason for the adoption of a more reserved manner in dealing with men who have already been for some time under the influence of the Gospel teaching, may be found, not only in the condition of their hearts as manifested by their treatment of the Word of God as far as it has been presented to them, but in this combined with another element, that of the character of the truths which it is now time for them to receive, as a supplement to those which have been already set before them. We find this principle illustrated in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews, in which it is the object of the Apostle to unfold the great doctrine of the Priesthood of Christ. 'Of Whom,' he says, 'we have much to say, and hard to be intelligibly uttered, because you are become weak to hear. For whereas, for the time, you ought to be masters, you have need to be taught again what are the first elements of the words of God, and you are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that is a partaker of milk, is unskilful in the word of justice, for he is a little child. But strong meat is for the perfect, for those who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil. Wherefore, leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us go on to things more perfect, not laying again the foundation of penance from dead works, and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of imposition of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.'<sup>5</sup> This state of things in the mass of a population may make it necessary that the doctrines which belong to the class of which St. Paul speaks as things more perfect, should be imparted to them with much reserve and

<sup>5</sup> Heb. v. 11—vi. 2.

caution, and in such cases it is easy to see that the most natural method of meeting the requirements of the moment may be the use of a kind of teaching which is more intelligible to the advanced than to others, and which may instruct those who are capable of instruction without opening to others truths for which they are not yet fit. And where the difference between two classes of hearers is caused by the hardening of the hearts of some to the influences of Divine grace, the same kind of teaching may be adopted with the view of withdrawing certain great subjects from the gaze of the many, while the explanation of the same subjects is continued in such a way as to be understood by the few. The reasons for which our Lord, at this particular time, may have felt Himself almost forced to become more reticent with the people at large on certain great points of Divine truth, which were always very near to His Heart and constantly on His lips, has been treated of in another portion of this work, and perhaps little apology is needed for the insertion, in this place, to which the consideration properly belongs, of what has already been said elsewhere.

‘There is certainly abundant ground for considering that our Blessed Lord, to speak of Him after a human manner, felt Himself full of knowledge concerning God and His ways with His creatures, which He burned to impart to those to whom He was sent, but which they were not fit to receive. At the outset of His history we have an account of His conversation with Nicodemus,<sup>6</sup> to whom He spoke about the necessity of a new birth in Baptism with a plainness and openness which are surprising to us when we compare them with many parts of His subsequent teaching. There is the same directness of instruction to be remarked in the conver-

<sup>6</sup> St. John iii. 1, seq.



sation which follows, in St. John, between our Lord and the woman of Samaria. When He said to her about the Messias, "I Who speak unto thee am He,"<sup>7</sup> He made a direct assertion which He made at no other time, except when adjured by Caiaphas to declare whether He were the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. But to Nicodemus He used words of complaint, as if He were surprised at the dulness of his perception of spiritual truth—"Amen, amen, I say to thee, that we speak what we know and we testify what we have seen, and you receive not our testimony. I have spoken unto you earthly things, and you believe not, how will you believe if I shall speak unto you heavenly things?"<sup>8</sup> We need not draw out here the whole that might be said concerning this difficulty, which our Lord experienced almost universally, and to the very end of His Ministry, in meeting with hearts and minds capable of receiving His Divine doctrine. But these considerations prepare us to find that, when the time had come for Him to teach the people more fully about God, and especially about that great revelation of Himself which is contained in His Providence and in the arrangement of His Kingdom, in the widest sense of that word, He found Himself constrained to adopt this particular mode of teaching more exclusively, by means of which the mystery of the Kingdom might be enshrined in the most familiar form, a form which can hardly escape the memory after that faculty has once taken it in, and yet be so enshrined therein as not to be thrust upon the notice of those incapable of understanding it, while at the same time it invited the thoughtful pondering of those whose hearts were already to some extent enlightened concerning it. If we might be so bold as to compare what passed in our Lord's Sacred Heart with

<sup>7</sup> St. John iv. 26.<sup>8</sup> St. John iii. 11, 12.

what is noblest and best in the workings and productions of the most gifted of men—

Those whose hearts are beating high  
With the pulse of poesy—

we may venture to say that He was fain to pour forth, in some form analogous to the highest song, the thoughts to which the possession of all the knowledge concerning God with which the Sacred Humanity was endowed gave birth. The knowledge thus given to Him, like the other graces and treasures which were received at the time of the Hypostatic Union, were given, not for Himself alone, but for us—for the children of the Church throughout all ages ; and we may consider those instructions of His, which the Providence of His Father had determined should come down to us in the Gospel narratives, as having been framed for us as well as for those to whom they were immediately addressed. The revelation of the Father, which it was His commission to make to mankind, was thus made independent of the unworthiness and dulness and hardness of heart of those by whom He happened to be immediately surrounded during so large a portion of His teaching. If we are to apply to the Sacred Heart the rule which our Lord Himself gave, and say that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, so that we may judge of His habitual thoughts by the subjects that are always upon His lips, we must certainly say that the character and perfections of the Father were ever His darling subjects of contemplation. When the heart that was most near and most like unto His own, the heart of His Blessed Mother, poured itself out in her holy canticle of thanksgiving, it was in a strain that spoke of one wonderful perfection of God after another—His Lordship, His Providence in Redemption, His Condescension to the humble, His Power, His Sanctity, His Mercy, His Faith-



fulness in His promises, and that law of His Kingdom whereby the proud are confounded, the lowly exalted, the hungry filled, and the rich sent empty away. We cannot, then, be far wrong if we venture to approach the parables of our Lord with this thought in our minds—that they contain more, perhaps, than any other part of His teaching, His description of His Father in His dealings with those who belong to Him. Let us allow ourselves to suppose that to these applies, at least as fully as to any other of His discourses, the text already quoted from St. John—"The only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

‘We shall perhaps find that this view of the parables will bring their signification more into a harmonious whole than any other, and that, on the other hand, we hardly require a more complete system of teaching as to God and His Providence than that which is here contained. No doubt, a number of them refer immediately to the Church; but the Church is one great manifestation or fruit of God’s Fatherly Love, and the laws on which He has acted in respect to the Church have not been confined in their operation to what immediately concerns her. No doubt the far greater number of them, again, are meant to convey some distinct moral or practical lesson, such as the necessity of vigilance, or of Christian prudence, or the law of charity or of mutual forgiveness of injuries; but these lessons are pointed in the parables by distinct reference to something in God’s character or ways of dealing with us, which is the more immediate subject of the picture. And, perhaps, it may also be found—and this is the last argument for which there is room in the present paper—that this particular view of the general scope of the teaching by parables may explain some features in them which are otherwise the occasion of difficulties more or

less serious. Nor would it materially interfere with this view as to the general purport of the teaching by parables, if we find that our Lord now and then used the same form with another object, such as we can hardly help seeing, for instance, in the Parable of the Two Sons,<sup>9</sup> which He Himself explained as applying to the conduct of the priests and scribes on the one hand, and of the publicans and harlots on the other, with respect to the baptism of St. John. Nor, again, must it be urged against us that some of the parables, as that of the Labourers in the Vineyard, and the Unmerciful Servant, are undoubtedly addressed to the most intimate followers of our Lord. All these parables speak of great laws of God's Kingdom—and this is the main point on which we insist.

‘When we consider Who God is, and how infinitely His attributes and nature are above our comprehension, it must be obvious at once that His government of the universe must be, as a whole and in its parts, very far above the ken of our mental faculties, though at the same time it is equally true that in nature and in Providence, as well as in the supernatural order, He distinctly reveals Himself, and intends us to learn about Him from His works and ways. He is the one great object of the study and contemplation of all created intelligent beings, and at the same time He must, as it were, break the knowledge of Himself to us tenderly, He must raise us on high and add fresh power to our eyes before we can gaze on Him. If we could fully understand Him and His ways, He would not be our God ; if we could know nothing about Him and about them, we should not be the creatures He has made us, and our life here would not be a preparation for the blessedness which He intends for us hereafter, and of

<sup>9</sup> St. Matt. xxi. 26—32.



which we even now enjoy the partial foretaste. The very first thing that we know about Him is a mystery to us, in the common sense of the word. For the first great mystery in the Providence of God—in which we may include the creation as well as the government of the world—is that permission and tolerance of evil which follows as a necessary consequence from the planting of free creatures in a state of probation. Let us never underrate this. It has its answer, but not all can see it. Those familiar with the difficulties which practically beset and bewilder no inconsiderable number even of Christian and Catholic souls to whom the world is a puzzle and a riddle, will hardly question the importance of this difficulty, which pushes itself, if we may say so, in so many different directions, making men at one time question the justice of the decree which has loaded them with the responsibility of a choice whose issue is eternal, at another time doubt of the love which can create beings whom it foreknows shall be everlastingly miserable, or again, at another, rise up against the sentence which visits the rebellion of a weak and sorely tempted creature with a punishment so great as that which awaits the wicked in the next world. Or again, the difficulty takes the form, as we see in some of the Psalms, to quote no other example, of an inability to understand the prosperity of vice, the apparent impunity in this life of the enemies of God, and the afflictions and calamities which befall the just. Or, again, the thing which is unintelligible seems to be that God's work is so much marred and fettered in the world, that there is so little result for so great an expenditure of love, labour, and sacrifice, and that mischief is allowed to flourish even in the very home of good, and to corrupt those who would otherwise serve God in innocence and faithfulness.

‘Such are some of the difficulties of which we speak, and they all have their answer in the knowledge of God and of His character, His attributes, and His ways with men, and most of them are touched by the remark of St. Augustine, that God chooses rather to bring good out of evil than not to permit evil. Others, again, are met as St. Paul usually, in the first instance, meets difficulties about Providence and predestination, by a consideration of the absolute lordship and dominion of God over His creatures, whom He may place under whatever conditions He will, consistently, as whatever He wills must be consistent, with His justice and His holiness. And after this consideration of the absolute authority and ownership—so to speak—of a Creator over His creatures, there naturally follow others which are required also for difficulties of another kind, as well as for those of which we have spoken—considerations of God’s immense and boundless goodness, His tender care over His own, His mercy and long-suffering and indulgence to those who oppose themselves to Him, His ever-ready grace, His fatherly attention to prayer, and the like. Another great head of what we may call in general the mystery of God’s government, contains the whole chain of His dealings with man in respect of his fall and redemption, the arrangements made for his recovery, the manner in which it is brought about, and the special laws of the new kingdom which is its organ, and through which its blessings are administered. Here we come to what in a more restricted sense may be considered as the “mystery” of God’s Kingdom—the Divine “economy” of grace which is worked out through the Incarnation by means of an exquisite system, full of beauty, gentleness, and tenderness, the principles and many of the details of which will be found, on close inspection, to be figured in the parables. All these



things are what they are in detail on account of something which may be known and reflected on concerning God, and they cannot be understood and valued unless with respect to Him, and as reflecting His goodness or holiness, or mercifulness or justice.

‘This is a very imperfect as well as a very general description of the sort of truths which may be conceived as forming the more substantial points in the teaching by parables—the points to which other things are subordinated, and with reference to which those other things are best to be understood.’<sup>10</sup>

It may be added here, what is obvious from the consideration of the great object which was now occupying the mind of our Lord, that is, the formation of the Apostles for the special work in His Kingdom for which they were designed, that the subject matter of the first series of parables, on which we are now engaged, has a most distinct and important reference to the duties and conditions of the Christian Apostolate as such. It is true that these parables contain most important warnings to the hearers as well as to the teachers in the Divine Kingdom of the Church, and for that purpose it is most probable that it was that they were not addressed to the Apostles exclusively. But it is also true, that the parables, especially those of this series, set forth the most vital principles of the government of God with reference especially to this work of the salvation of men by means of the Word, and on this account they are quite as full of teaching for the rulers of the Christian people, the guides of souls, and administrators of the means of grace, as for those who are to be the subjects of those ministrations.

It should also be remarked that the parables of which

<sup>10</sup> *The Theology of the Parables.* This Essay will be found at the end of the first volume of *The Life of our Life.*

we speak are carefully divided by St. Matthew—who gives them all but one, which one is inserted by St. Mark—into two portions, the first of which was delivered by our Lord to the people, and afterwards more or less, explained by Him to the Apostles in private, the second part being addressed, as it seems, to the Apostles alone in the house, after some of the former parables had been expounded to them. To the first of these classes belong the Parable of the Sower, that of the Wheat and the Cockle, that of the Seed cast into the Ground, that of the Grain of Mustard Seed, and that of the Leaven. At the termination of this first portion of the series St. Matthew places his declaration, that our Lord spoke all these things to the people in parables, and did not any longer speak to them without parables. Then he subjoins the explanation, by our Lord, of the two first parables just now enumerated. And after this explanation he adds three more, as to which it seems that we are to gather that they were addressed especially to the Apostles. These are the parables of the Merchant seeking precious pearls, of the man who finds a Treasure in a field, and of the Draw-net, which is emptied on the shore. After this second series, our Lord asks His disciples whether they understand these things, and on their answering that they understand them, he subjoins the remark, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a man who is a householder who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old.’ There is a certain difference and even a certain contrast between these two series, of which it will be well to speak hereafter.

The scene of the parables of which the Evangelists now speak is probably near Capharnaum, if they were not delivered on the sea coast in front of the city itself. Travellers tell us that the scenery of the first parable,



that of the Sower, is to be found in many spots in that neighbourhood, where the road runs near the sea, and where the rocky ground and thornbrakes intrude upon the fields of good soil.<sup>11</sup> But the language of the Evangelists seem to fix the spot close to the city. 'Jesus, going out of the house, sat by the seaside. He began to teach by the seaside, and a great multitude was gathered together unto Him, so that He went up into a boat and sat in the sea, and all the multitude was upon the land by the seaside. And He taught them many things in parables, and said to them in His doctrine or teaching, Hear ye. Behold, the sower went out to sow, and when He soweth, some fell by the wayside, and the birds of the air came and ate it up. And other some fell upon rocky ground, where it had not much earth, and it shot up immediately because it had no depth of earth. And when the sun was risen, it was scorched, and because it had no root nor moisture it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And some fell upon good ground, and brought forth fruit that grew up and increased and yielded, one thirty,

<sup>11</sup> Dean Stanley tells us, of a spot near the approach to the Plain of Gennesareth, 'A slight recess in the hill-side, close upon the plain, disclosed at once, in detail, and with a conjunction which I remember nowhere else in Palestine, every feature of the great parable. There was the undulating cornfield descending to the water's edge. There was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent the seed from falling here and there on either side of it, or upon it; itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule, and human feet. There was the 'good' rich soil, which distinguishes the whole of that plain and its neighbourhood from the bare hills elsewhere descending into the lake, and which, when there is no interruption, produces one vast mass of corn. There was the rocky ground of the hill-side protruding here and there through the cornfields, as elsewhere through the grassy slopes. There were the large bushes of thorn—the Nahk, that kind of which tradition says that the Crown of Thorns was woven—springing up, like the fruit-trees of the more inland parts, in the very midst of the waving wheat' (*Sinai and Palestine*, c. xiii. p. 426).

and another sixty, and another a hundred. And He said, he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

St. Matthew subjoins to this parable the statement that His disciples came to our Lord and asked Him the reason for His adopting this new method of teaching, and he also gives our Lord's answer. Then he gives us the explanation which our Lord gave, not only of His reasons for speaking in this way to the multitude, but also of the parable itself. After this St. Matthew inserts the second parable, that of the Wheat and Cockle, as well as others. The other two Evangelists lead us to suppose that the parables were given, in the order in which they stand, to the people, and that the explanations—for our Lord explained the second parable as well as the first—were given afterwards to the disciples in the house. The difference is very easily explained. It is very likely indeed that St. Matthew, who is fond of the order of ideas rather than the order of time, passed naturally to the question of the Apostles and the explanation of the first parable before going on to the second. This would be quite in harmony with the method of the first Evangelist, of which we have already had so many examples.

But this explanation of the apparent difference in this place is not necessary, and it is well worth our while to examine the statements of the Evangelists more closely. It is clear that the Apostles asked our Lord two distinct questions, the first of which related to the manner of His teaching, while the second had reference to the meaning of the parables. The answer to the first question is contained in the passage about the hardness of heart of the Jews, and the answer to the second is found in the detailed explanation of the Parable of the Sower and, afterwards, in that of the Parable of the Cockle. It is very natural to think that the first question may have been put



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immediately upon the occurrence which caused the surprise of the Apostles, and that the other may have occurred later. It is also quite possible that our Lord answered both questions at the same time, that is, after He had dismissed the multitude and was alone with His Apostles in the house to which He used to retire for the night after His teaching. Or He may have given an answer to the first question at the time it was first put, that is, while He was yet teaching, though He repeated it at the later time, when He was alone with the disciples. If this be supposed, it will be seen that there are several minor differences in the language of the various Evangelists, St. Matthew on the one hand, and St. Mark and St. Luke on the other, which are most readily explained by this difference of the two occasions to which their narratives relate, and for this reason it seems better to follow this explanation of the apparent difficulty. ‘And His disciples came to Him, and said to Him, Why speakest Thou to them in parables? Who answered and said to them, Because to you it is given to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. For he that hath, to him shall be given and he shall abound, but he that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath. Therefore do I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And the prophecy of Isaias is fulfilled in them, who saith, By hearing you shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive. For the heart of this people is grown gross, and with their ears they have been dull of hearing, and their eyes they have shut, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see,

and your ears, because they hear. For, Amen, I say to you, many prophets and just men have desired to see the things that you see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things that you hear, and have not heard them.<sup>12</sup>

This is our Lord's account of the reason why He spoke in Parables. It is clear from the whole form of the passage, in which He is evidently giving a reason which is founded upon His past experience of the people of whom He speaks, that it is something in their past conduct and manner of dealing with Divine truths which has brought upon them, as a kind of judgment or chastisement, this new method of His in the imparting the Gospel mysteries. It follows from the form of our Lord's words that, if they had treated Him differently in the past, He would not now be teaching them in this comparatively obscure and difficult way. In the same way, the words which are quoted from Isaias speak of the conduct of the people as the reason for our Lord's way of dealing with them. They have gone on hearing without hearing, or understanding, their heart has grown gross, their ears have become dull, they have shut their eyes, as if they had determined on preventing that blessed influence of His addressing Himself to them, which would have ended in their conversion and in their healing by our Lord. Thus the parabolic teaching is adopted as a more reserved way of communicating Divine knowledge to those who have not availed themselves of the more open and easy way in which they were first addressed. There is no difficulty in understanding this in the obvious meaning of our Lord's words.

On the other and later occasion on which language so very similar to this is used by our Lord, the interpretation is not so easy. This occasion was immediately

<sup>12</sup> Isaias vi. 9, 10.



after the termination of the first series of the parables, at least of those which were certainly delivered in public. Then again our Lord gave His reason, and again He quoted the words of Isaias, though without, this time, mentioning the name of the Prophet. It is more accurate, perhaps, to say that He adopted the words of the prophecy for the purpose of emphasizing His own language. 'They came to Him,' the Evangelist tells us, 'to ask Him the parable'—meaning the Parable of the Sower. He gives them the fullest and most detailed explanation, but He prefaces this explanation by words which, as has been said, are almost a repetition of those of which we have been speaking. 'And He said to them, to you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to them that are without, all things are done in parables, that seeing they may see and may not perceive, and hearing they may not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.' Here then the teaching by parables is said to have been adopted for the sake of hiding from the hearers outside the Mystery of the Kingdom, that they might not understand what they heard. Before He had said, that because they did not understand, the new kind of teaching had been used, and now He says that it is used in order that they may not understand. The cause in the one sentence becomes in the other the end aimed at. He teaches in parables because men do not understand Him, and He teaches in parables in order that men may not understand Him.

Moreover, it is to be remarked that our Lord, in the first of these passages, gives a twofold reason for the adoption of this form of teaching, while in the second passage He only gives, as such, a single reason. In the first passage He begins His account of the motives on

which He is acting by a reference, not to the multitude, but to the disciples. 'Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given.' And He ends the passage, in the first instance, with words which are not repeated in the second instance. 'But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.' And He goes on to speak of the many prophets and just men who have desired to see the things that they see, and have not seen them, and the rest. It is plain that language of this kind was very natural, when our Lord had been speaking of the dulness of the multitudes as the cause of His adopting the more reserved way of teaching, but that it is less in place when He has been speaking of the reserve which He has adopted as a judicial measure on the people who would not attend to Him. It is as if He had said, I act as I am acting because they are not able to understand the mysteries which you can understand, and very blessed indeed you are because you can understand them. The time is come for Me to speak of these wonderful features in the government of My Father, and you can understand them, and so lose nothing by having them in parables, and the others cannot grasp them, and could not do so even if they were put before them more plainly. At that time the disciples did not, as St. Matthew implies, ask our Lord the meaning of the parable itself. But on the second occasion they did ask the meaning of what they had heard, and He explained it to them, but only in a manner which seemed to signify that they might have been able to understand Him, even without explanation. For 'He saith to them, Are you ignorant of this parable? and how shall you know all parables?' And again, at the close of the explanation which He gave them, He added some words about a candle being



meant to be put on a candlestick, and not under a bushel or a bed, about the manifestation of everything which is hidden, and the like, and subjoined His teaching on the necessity of carefulness in hearing. 'In what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again, and more shall be given to you . . . for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, that also which he thinketh he hath shall be taken away from him.' It is, therefore, quite certain that there is a decided variation, on the part of the Evangelists, in these two reports of words which seem to be similar, if not identical—a variation which cannot be simply explained by supposing that they are only giving different versions of the same words uttered by our Lord at the same time.

It would not be difficult to show that this is no true ground for questioning the perfect accuracy of the accounts of the several Evangelists. On the contrary, it may be truly said, that any complete account of the action of God in cases such as that of the people of whom our Lord is speaking, requires the double statement which is conveyed by the two accounts of our Lord's words put together. Our Lord is speaking of the revelation of God's truths, and of the imparting of His grace in harmony with that revelation. This is a great gift of God, and one for which a great account has to be given here and hereafter. As is shown by the parable itself which elicited these questions of the Apostles, the knowledge of the truth is like seed scattered broadcast on the ground of various kinds, and the failure or success of which depends upon the ground. But the ground on which ordinary seed is cast cannot make itself good, or free itself from stones or thorns, or secure for itself moisture, or drive away the birds of heaven. It is helpless and blameless, if failure follows on the sowing. It is without a claim for moral praise if fruitful-

ness follows. It is not so with the human soil on which the Word of God falls. If the ear is dull, or the eye dimmed, or the heart gross, it is because of moral defects in the persons to whom these remarks apply. They might be punished by a direct withdrawal of the Word. It might pass on to others, who might receive it better. This was the way adopted by the Apostles afterwards, when the Jews rejected their witness concerning our Lord. They turned to the Gentiles, telling the Jews that their blood was on their own head. But our Lord did not at once adopt this extreme measure of shutting Himself off altogether from the sheep of the House of Israel, to whom He was especially sent. He adopted the method of teaching them in a less open way. The punishment, in so far as it was a punishment, was exactly proportioned to the fault which called it down. They took no heed to the light, and the light was at least partially withdrawn. Blindness was the punishment of negligence, and of the hardness of heart which made them so inattentive to the word which might have saved them. And then in turn, the punishment became the cause, or the occasion, of further blindness. They chose to be blind, and they were treated in a way to make them still blinder. Their opportunities were curtailed, the light that was vouchsafed them was made dim. They had chosen not to see, and they became unable to see. When the time came for the deeper mysteries of the kingdom to be imparted, they were set forth in a way the Jews could not understand.

It is very remarkable how this doctrine of the blinding of the Jews meets us again and again in the New Testament. We have seen how it is put in its mildest form in the first Gospel, that of St. Matthew, in which the simple fact is stated that the people would not see. In the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke the other words of our Lord



are chosen which speak of their blindness as brought on them as a judgment. In the Gospel of St. John the same passage of the Prophet is quoted, not indeed with reference to the teaching by parables, but at the end of the history of our Lord's preaching in Judæa, where St. John gives a sort of summary account of their unbelief. 'Whereas He had done so many miracles before them, they believed not in Him, that the saying of Isaias might be fulfilled which he said, Lord, who hath believed our hearing? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore,' this Evangelist goes on, 'they could not believe, because Isaias saith again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, not understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.'<sup>13</sup> The same mournful strain strikes our ear as we close the volume of the history of the Acts of the Apostles. There it is the great Apostle St. Paul, so burning with love for his people, for whose sake he was ready to make himself 'anathema' from Jesus Christ. 'Well did the Holy Ghost speak to our fathers by Isaias the Prophet, saying, Go to this people and say to them, with the ear you shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see and shall not perceive. For the heart of this people is grown gross, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and their eyes they have shut; lest perhaps they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them.''<sup>14</sup> These were the words of St. Paul at the close of that memorable interview which St. Luke relates as having taken place immediately on the arrival of the Apostle at Rome, with some of the chiefs of the Jewish colony there. But in these words the great Apostle was

<sup>13</sup> St. John xii. 37—41.<sup>14</sup> Acts xxviii. 25—27.

repeating what he had already written in his Epistle to the Roman Church, in which he goes at length into the great question of the reprobation of the Jews and the vocation of the Gentiles to the faith in their place. The doctrine of St. Paul in that Epistle is necessary for the completion of our view of this passage in the Gospels. The great counsel of God in the rejection of what had hitherto been his own peculiar people was, as it were, begun in its execution at so early a date in the very life of our Lord, as this occasion of the opening of the teaching by parables. In the eleventh chapter to the Romans St. Paul had already quoted this same passage of Isaias which is, as it were, the classical text in the Old Testament with reference to this counsel of Divine Providence. 'As it is written, God hath given them the spirit of insensibility, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear unto this present day, and David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block, and a recompense unto them. Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always.'<sup>15</sup>

The whole explanation of the action of God in this withdrawal of the opportunities of full light from the Jews, who had so badly availed themselves of those opportunities as far as they had been already offered to them, is thus seen to be conveyed by the two passages which convey the two versions of the words of our Lord presented to us by the several Evangelists. The two versions do not seem to relate to the same actual conversation, and they certainly explain, and confirm, and supply one the other, instead of showing any contradiction.

If we are to suppose that these words were severally spoken on two different occasions, we are able to set

<sup>15</sup> Rom. xi. 8 ; Psalm lxxviii. 23:



before ourselves a more distinct picture of the whole time occupied in this first series of the parables of our Lord. The whole time was not long—perhaps two or three days at the most, and there are evident signs in the narrative of the reserve in which our Lord now enfolded Himself, such as seem to explain and comment upon the alarm which was manifested by our Blessed Lady and His nearest relatives at this time. He had lately arrived in the neighbourhood, and the multitudes at once collected, as of old, to welcome Him, and to profit by the mercifulness which He was always ready to show in the case of those diseased or possessed by the devils. But we hear of no cures as connected with the parabolic teaching at this time. The first two Evangelists tell us that on this occasion again our Lord went up into a boat, and taught the multitudes therefrom, while they stood round the little bay on the shore. This was not now done for the first time, but there may still have been some idea of greater precaution on this occasion.

Our Lord began to teach them as usual, but with the great difference that He used only the parabolic form of instruction. He taught them ‘many things in parables,’ but, as has been said, we have only preserved to us by the Evangelists some few of these instructions, for the parables which we have in the Gospels could not have taken very long to deliver, unless some comments and explanations were added, and this supposition seems to be precluded by the circumstances of the case. Soon after the beginning of the instruction, at all events before the close, when He retired to the house with His disciples, they asked Him their first question concerning the method which He was now adopting for the first time exclusively, and then He answered them in the words recorded by St. Matthew, saying that to them it was given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of

God, but not to others. It was the rule of the Kingdom that it should be given to him that had, and he should abound, and that from him that had not should be taken away even that which he had. He spoke to the people in parables, because seeing they saw not, and the rest. The prophecy of Isaias was fulfilled in them, which He went on to quote. But blessed were the eyes and ears of the disciples, for they saw and heard. Many prophets and kings had longed for the things of which they had the privilege to be partakers. Then, as it appears, He went on to add the Parable of the Cockle among the Wheat to that of the Sower, and this was followed by that of the Seed which grows of itself, and by two others, that of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven. This seems to be all of the teaching delivered to the people of which we have any record, and it is clearly not enough to have filled up the time of a single day, even if we were to add to it the other three parables of which the Evangelists make mention, those of the Pearl and the Treasure and the Draw-net.

In the evening, when our Lord was alone with His disciples, they asked Him to explain the Parable of the Sower first of all, and then, as St. Mark and St. Luke tell us, He repeated to some extent what He had already said about the reason on account of which He spoke in parables. This time He put it in a different way, telling them that it was given to them, and not to those without, to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to others these things were done in parables, that seeing they might not see, and the rest. This method of putting the truth, of which He had before spoken, contains the tacit suggestion that they might have understood the parable without requiring the explanation from Him. He added, 'Are you ignorant of this parable? And how shall you know all parables?' As if He had



many more in store, and as if they ought to be by this time sufficiently trained to discernment not to require His commentary on these parables. Then He added the explanation of the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. It was then also that He spoke the words already referred to, that a candle was not to be put under a bushel or under a bed, implying that His doctrine was not to be kept secret. There was nothing hid that was not to be made manifest, neither was it made secret but that it might come abroad. 'He that hath ears to hear let him hear.' He bade them take heed how they heard, they would be dealt with according to the same measure with which they would mete in their dealings with God, and He repeated the words about him that hath being further enriched, and about the taking away from him that hath not, even that which he thinketh he hath.

After this, as it appears, our Lord explained to the disciples the Parable of the Cockle, and added the three last of the series, as already named, the Parables of the 'Treasure, of the Pearl, and of the Net. Lastly, He asked them whether they now understood these parables, and on their answering that they did understand them, He said, as St. Matthew tells us, 'Therefore every Scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old.' The same Evangelist tells us that after finishing these parables our Lord 'passed from thence.' But St. Matthew, for purpose connected with the wonderful order in which his Gospel has been arranged, has inserted in a much earlier part of his work the incidents which followed on the conclusion of the parabolic teaching, while the other two historical Evangelists tell us how closely these incidents were connected with that conclusion.

It may also be here observed in general, before we

proceed to the explanation of the parables in detail, that there is something in the subject-matter of the teaching which seems to be especially referred to in the words of our Lord, when He speaks of the mysteries or mystery of the Kingdom of God as being hidden from the Jews in general by the parabolic form of teaching now adopted, while at the same time they are not hidden from the disciples. It is as if a great step had been gained in the fact that there was now a body of men capable of understanding how the Word of God was to be received, and what was to be expected by those whose business it would be to disseminate it. For the direct teaching which we gather from the series of parables taken together, is certainly connected with the reception which the Divine seed of the Word is to meet with at the hands of men in general. It is therefore directly practical in the sense that it contains a warning to us, in the case at least of the first parable, to be very careful, as our Lord said in the course of this teaching, how we hear. The moral teaching of the Parable of the Wheat and Cockle is something different, but it refers also directly to the issue of the great work of God's mercy which consists in the sowing of the good seed in the field of the Church. Now these two items of teaching have a particular importance, as is evident, for those who are to be employed, as the Apostles, in the sowing of the good seed. Such persons are warned in the first parable to expect the very partial growth of the seed which they sow, and in the second parable they are warned not to be too hasty in anything that may correspond practically to the rooting up of the cockle before the time. These are instructions most important to Apostolic men, and as such they are quite in their place in this period of our Lord's Ministry, when, as has so often been said, He



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was especially occupied in the formation of the Apostles for their great work in His Church. It is not difficult to see that the other parables of this series, that of the seed which grows night and day of itself, that of the Grain of Mustard Seed, and that of the Leaven, are, like the two others, direct prophecies and descriptions of what was to be in the Kingdom of the Gospel. These truths are important to all, but they are more important to Apostolic men than to others. In this sense they are specially mysteries of the Kingdom, they relate to the conditions under which God is content to work on the hearts and souls of men, the lavishness of His offers of grace in comparison to their success, the principle in accordance with which He values the thirty fold, or the sixty fold, or the hundred fold of some, as a compensation for the loss of so many more, the principle on which He allows of scandals and failures without immediate vengeance on the guilty, the principle of the silent workings of grace, of the magnificent external expansion of the Church, and also that of her leavening influence on the society which her presence, as it were, assimilates. These heads of teaching are very different indeed in their practical import from the precepts and counsels of the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *The Parable of the Sower.*

St. Matt. xiii. 18—23 ; St. Mark iv. 10—25 ; St. Luke viii. 9—18 ;  
*Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 61.

ENOUGH has already been said to explain the general purpose of our Lord in the parabolic teaching, the first instances of which must now be made the subject of more particular study by us. We shall see how very wide is the range of this teaching, and how it can easily be understood that not all that the Apostles and disciples might learn from it was naturally to be proposed, without some reserve, to the people at large. Our Lord has been at the pains, not only to explain the first parable at considerable length Himself, but to leave behind Him in the Gospels this explanation, as if to furnish us with certain principles of interpretation for other similar cases, in which we are more or less left to ourselves in the study of His Divine words. It will be seen that the subject matter of the whole of this series of parables is more or less the same, and, when we come to try to unfold the great treasures of doctrine which it contains, we shall perhaps be no less astonished at the amount of truth which is here condensed and compressed in so small a space, than at the details of the parabolic teaching in themselves. In fact, it would require many volumes to set forth the whole of the riches of Christian truth that were here handed over to the devout consideration of the Christian student in words so few and so simple.



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It will be easily remembered that the first parable describes the fate, so to say, of the Divine seed of the Word of God, under the image of the issue of an actual sowing, in the case of which there were four several kinds of seed, or rather, four several results of the committal of the seed to the ground. In the first case, the seed had not been allowed to remain in the ground at all. In the second case, it had sprung up for a short while, and then had withered away. In the third case, it had sprung up and been choked. In the fourth case alone had it come to maturity and produced its expected fruit, thirty fold, sixty fold, a hundred fold. The causes of failure in the first three cases had been various. In the one it had been that the seed had fallen by the wayside or on the footpath, where it had been trodden under foot or snatched away by the birds of the air. In the second case it had fallen on stony ground without depth or moisture, and had not been able to withstand the scorching rays of the sun in consequence. In the third case it had grown up in the midst of thorns, which had sprung up and choked it, depriving it of the moisture and support from the soil which it required. Here, then, is a sufficient variety of causes of failure, and on the other hand there is the counterbalancing description of the good soil, the fruitfulness of which is enough to compensate for more failures than those which have been spoken of. At the same time it is obvious that a hearer who had only very imperfectly perceived the drift of the parable in our Lord's mouth must have been stimulated to much anxious questioning as to the several causes of unfruitfulness of which he had heard, and have been eager to know what was represented by the wayside, what by the fowls of the air, what by the stony ground, what by the thorns, and how he could secure for the Divine Word, which was represented by the seed, that happy reception

in his own heart which was figured in the prolific return of the good soil. And, as it must be remembered that the Apostles were now in the course of formation by our Lord, for that holy Ministry among the souls of men for which they were destined, it is easy to imagine that they also must have been full of speculation and surmise as to the precise meaning of the short but most pregnant parable which they had just heard. There need be no doubt that the parable was but a simple adaptation to Divine purposes of what was passing before their eyes, perhaps at the very time when the words of our Lord were spoken. The seed time was now come, in what we should call the early winter season, the work of husbandry was in full course, and many of those who listened to the discourse must have had practical acquaintance with the details of which our Lord spoke. There was no difficulty about understanding so simple a figure, as far as the figure itself went—but what were the verities concealed behind these commonplace details?

There are points, as we shall see, in the Divine economy or way of action, to parts of which the present parable refers, which our Lord did not draw out even for the instruction of the disciples. He did not tell them, for instance, how it is that God has chosen, in imparting His truths to men, to act as a sower of seed, rather than in any other manner. He might, for instance, have acted as the planter of trees. He might have planted just as many as he wished to grow. Or He might have acted as a builder, according to an image which we find used of Him elsewhere in Scripture, Who provides all the material of His edifice, and wastes none of it. Again, our Lord spoke here of the ground as having this or that quality, on which He makes the success of the process depend, and He says nothing of the good qualities of the seed itself, or of the sunshine and rain and



air which, as a matter of fact, have so large a part in the production of the fertile harvest. He is describing the various causes of failure, and He does not describe the causes of success except so far as they are left to be inferred from the effects of their opposites. Still less does our Lord here draw out the very important truths connected with the possible improvement or deterioration of the particular kinds of soil of which He speaks, as how the stony ground may become moist and deep soil, or how the thorns may be weeded out, or how the good soil, in its turn, may be turned into the barren. That there may be changes thus wrought in the conditions under which the seed is received, is implied both in the giving of the parable itself and in the words which our Lord subjoins, 'Take heed how you hear,' and the rest. But it is the principle of the 'parabolic teaching, that various truths belonging to the same great subject are kept for treatment in several and successive parables, and not often combined in one. The truth on which our Lord insists, in particular, relates to the various dangers which beset the good seed when it is sown, as it is sown ordinarily, by being scattered broadcast over the world.

It may also be remarked in the outset, that the conditions of which the parable speaks increase in badness and goodness in an inverse measure—that is, that the first condition of the seed which is unfruitful is the worst of all, that in which the prospects of a favourable issue is altogether taken away, for the seed by the wayside is caught away from the heart by the evil spirit. The condition which comes next in order is that of the seed which grows up and is then withered by the burning heat of the sun, and in that case also, though there has been some progress towards fruitfulness, the further hope is altogether defeated. The seed thrown among the thorns

is in a less unfavourable condition, because there might be a hope of its fruitfulness if the thorns are removed. In the case of the seed sown on the good soil, the first increase is of thirty fold, the second of sixty fold, and the last of a hundred fold. Thus, our Lord seems to imply that all the dangers must be avoided successively, and not one alone—the pathside, the fowls of the air, the unprepared soil, the choking thorns, and that even when the seed is fruitful it may become more fruitful, the thirty-fold become sixty, the sixty a hundred-fold. Again, it may be remarked that it is not fairly to be gathered from this parable that the greater part of the seed is wasted. Although there are three out of the four conditions in which this waste takes place, yet they are not conditions which could not naturally be expected to be verified in the case of the greater part of the seed sown by the sower. In all ordinary circumstances, the great majority of the seed would be thrown on the good and fertile ground, and not on the stony soil or among the thorns, or by the wayside. And the return of the good seed as stated by our Lord is never less than thirty fold, while in other cases it reaches as much as a hundred fold—far more than enough to reward the labour and expenditure of the husbandman, even if he loses some of his grain among the thorns and in the other ways mentioned in the parable. So far, then, the effect of this parable is not such as generally to discourage the Apostolic labourers for God, though it is certainly such as to cause great carefulness and fear among those who have the opportunity of listening to the Word of God. For even though the number is not to be so very great of those who hear the Word of God altogether in vain, still there are all the dangers to be escaped of which our Lord speaks under the various images of the



wayside, the shallow soil, and the ground occupied by the thorns.

With this preface, we may now proceed to the explanation of the Parable of the Sower, as it is given to us in the three Evangelists. 'The parable is this; He that soweth, soweth the Word. The Seed is the Word of God. When any one heareth the Word of God and understandeth it not, there cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. As soon as they have heard, immediately Satan cometh and taketh away the Word that was sown in their heart, lest believing they should be saved. This is he that received the Word by the wayside.' This is the first part of the parable, and it corresponds to the few words with which it had begun—'The sower went out to sow his seed, and some fell by the wayside and the birds of the air came and ate it up.' St. Luke adds one detail more, namely, that the seed was trodden down before it was eaten up. The Sower, then, is our Lord Himself, and the Seed that He sows is His own, not the word of another, and whether it be this or that person who, having his commission from our Lord, sows the seed, it is our Lord's Word and He is the principal Sower of it.

The whole language of the parable seems to suggest that our Lord is mainly speaking of the sowing of the seed by means of the ordinance of preaching, for in this case it is that it is most common for seed to fall by the wayside, and to be scattered broadcast over the audience, as it were. But still it must be remembered that the Divine Word and the grace of God may be offered to men in many different ways and by many different means, such as example, or conversation, or reading, or that kind of contact with the truth in the persons and characters of those with whom we live, which but few

people can be altogether without experiencing. If all these kinds of the sowing of the seed are not directly included in the scope of the parable, it is certainly true that the words of the parable may be easily accommodated to them. The explanation given by our Lord of that which He says takes place when the seed is cast by the wayside or trampled under foot, is that men hear the Word of God and do not understand it. There are many causes of want of understanding in men, some of them intellectual and some of them moral, and we must suppose our Lord to be chiefly speaking of the latter. It is a part of the faithfulness of God, as our Creator and Lord and Provider, not to make the Word or the doctrine of salvation too difficult for men to understand if they choose. But it is also a part of His wisdom and justice to require attention, on their part, to the message which is delivered to them in His Name. The sensual man, St. Paul tells us, perceiveth not those things which are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand.<sup>1</sup> And it is in this part of this great parable that we must look for the case of those who do not understand because they do not attend, and who do not attend because their hearts and minds are full of other things, other interests, other desires, which bind them down to things of earth and of sense. The pure holy Word of God, speaking to the heart about the value of the soul and of the law of conscience, and of eternity, and of judgment, can be, in a thoroughly sensual worldly heart, only like a grain of delicate seed which has fallen out of the hand of the sower on to the common pathway, where many a foot is sure to pass in the course of a short space of time, which will infallibly crush it and destroy its life and power of fructification. The images of sin and self-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.



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indulgence on which such hearts delight to dwell, and the blasts of passion, of lust, of anger, of pride, of envy, and the like, which sweep over them from moment to moment, are like so many ironclad heels to trample down the tiny seed which has fallen there as if by chance. This is a different case from that to be mentioned presently, of the cares of the world and the like which choke the seed. The heart entirely engrossed with passion, pleasure, vanity, and frivolity does not take in the Word at all, any more than the trodden pathway receives the seed into its soil.

But our Blessed Lord dwells chiefly upon another feature, in the case of such hearts as these, which it is even still more important to have continually before our minds. He tells us of the activity of Satan in snatching the seed as it is sown. It is not enough for him that the heart is hard, it is not enough for him that men are their own tempters, their own enemies. He must exercise his hellish vigilance and malice, in taking care that there shall be no chance left of the germination which is still possible as long as the seed remains in the heart. He must catch it away, as the birds of the air pick up the stray seeds which they find on the highway. Here is a point in the parable which we should not, perhaps, have suspected, if our Lord had not Himself drawn our attention to it—that what seems simple forgetfulness or indifference or dulness is often the direct result of the action of Satan on the soul. It is the experience of all who try to pray or to meditate, that they are visited with a swarm of distractions and interior troubles at such times, of which they do not find themselves the victims at other times. And so it is certainly, in the case of those who hear the Word of God in the administration of the ordinance of preaching. ‘Wonderful,’ says an old writer on the parables, ‘is the envy of the demon

and the hatred of Satan against those who hear the Word of God. It is then that he brings on sleep, it is then that he introduces the twittering of swallows, that is the inopportune words of those who neither listen themselves nor will let others listen, the cries of infants, the barking of dogs. It is his wont then to bring up the thought of our domestic cares, of law suits, and the like, which may hinder the attention, or he sets people to judge of the preachers, so as to complain of the length of their sermons, or of their too great subtlety, or their dryness, or their obscurity. He makes them pass sinister interpretations on their language, or the loudness of their voice, or on their reproofs of those whom they address. In short, in every way possible he makes it his aim, either that what is said may not be heard, or that if it is heard, it may not be understood, or that if it is understood, it may slip away from the memory, or at all events may not be put into practice.’<sup>2</sup>

And it would certainly be a great gain to many souls, if they would more carefully realize the doctrine which is contained in this passage from our Lord’s own lips, namely that the Word of God preached from the Christian pulpit is, indeed, our Lord’s own word and not the word of man, and that, on the other hand, the common temptations which ordinarily hinder the great mass of men either from frequenting sermons or from profiting by them, are nothing more or less than the work of the devil. He knows what we do not realize, that the Word of God, when preached by His appointed ministers, has the promise of the assistance of Divine grace in the hearts of those who listen to it as the Word of God, and therefore it matters comparatively little, whether the preacher be eloquent, or learned, or adorned by the gifts which make up the great orator. For what is required for

<sup>2</sup> Salmeron, *in loc.*



the cooperation of grace, is the right intention on the part of the preacher, and the right and docile disposition on the part of the hearer. And as we constantly hear of some of his emissaries, in countries where the sect is established which makes it a rule not to call in the assistance of the Church, whether in life or in death, straining every nerve to prevent the sinner who is on his death-bed from having the opportunity of making his peace with God by means of the Catholic sacraments, and for this diabolical end watching day and night by the side of the poor dying man lest he should repent, so do these words of our Lord describe the malignant activity of the evil one in shutting out, if he can, every chance or hope of the access of the Divine Word to the soul of the hearer.

It must not be supposed that in this part of his warfare against souls Satan acts in any different manner from that in which he ordinarily acts. He prefers to make men their own tempters, and he does not interpose in his own person, with any of his more violent assaults, unless there be need. The evil spirits have no need to show themselves prominently in the case of men who are already to a great extent their slaves, by having given themselves over to the bondage of their passions, and there is even less need for the intervention in any preternatural way of those enemies of mankind, in the case of persons who are thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the world, which breathes a heresy more subtle, and more universally destructive and exclusive of the movements of grace, than the mere brutalities of lust or anger. But at the same time that this is true, it is very well to be reminded, as we are by this point of the teaching of our Lord, that what appear to be little accidents and annoyances, trifles in themselves, and of no account at all, except that they are as successful and powerful as the

most serious impediments that can be imagined in diverting the attention of the mind or the heart from the word of God, are in truth the devices of the evil one, who knows as well as any most skilful general that in war nothing is to be despised. The saints of God think nothing too minute as a precaution for securing the calm and uninterrupted leisure of the mind which has either to pray to God or to listen to God, and it is not wonderful that those who hate the intercourse of the human soul with its Maker and Lord as much as the saints and the angels love it, should avail themselves of every little thing for the sake of hindering the blessed seed, which has in itself a power of fructification so marvellous, from lighting on a soul in which the wonders which it may work are unlimited. It has been said more than once, that it is a feature in the saintly mind to discern the action of the evil spirits in the slightest and commonest incidents of daily life, and certainly this doctrine of our Lord tends to confirm this instinct of His saints.

In the case of this seed which falls by the wayside, the hope of its success is ended when the birds of the air have done their work and taken the seed away. The second instance of failure in the seed, of which our Lord goes on to speak, is in some respects not quite so fatal, and in other respects it is more lamentable. In the case of which we are now to speak, the good seed of the Word is taken in with a certain amount of readiness and avidity, but the shallowness of the soil prevents its striking its roots deep into the soil. ‘And these likewise are they that are sown on the stony ground, who when they hear the Word immediately receive it with joy, and they have no root in themselves, but are only for a time, and when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the Word, they are presently scandalized, they believe for a while, and in time of temptation they fall away.’



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It must frequently happen in countries like those in which these parables were spoken, that the scorching sun of the summer soon withers up the shoots, which have sprung up in ground which has not moisture or depth sufficient for the strong nourishment which is required under such conditions of atmosphere. Our Lord uses this circumstance as an illustration of another form of danger to the good seed of the Word of God. That Word is so congenial to the needs of human souls, it is so full of the sweetness and wisdom of God, and of the beauty which naturally belongs to all His works, it comes to men when they are so exhausted with futile efforts to find out the truth for themselves, and to provide in some sort of way for the craving after what is true and beautiful and holy which belongs to them as His intelligent creatures, it breathes peace and hope and security, and answers so perfectly the questions by which men are ordinarily tormented, that it is not wonderful that it should be welcomed at first by many souls which yet have not the strength to undergo trial for its sake.

At the time when this parable was spoken, our Lord must have had before His mind many cases to which the description of the seed sown on the stony ground would apply. The Gospel teaching had been presented to the populations of Galilee with a charm and attractiveness quite unexampled. He had been Himself the Preacher, and He had recommended the beautiful doctrines which He delivered by His own ineffable graciousness of manner, as well as by hundreds of miracles of mercy. He had been received with enthusiasm, and at first there was no opposition to His teaching and no hostility to His Person. It was but natural that men should flock to such a Teacher, and that the Divine doctrine which He scattered around Him, as the sower scatters his seeds, should have been eagerly caught at by thousands.

But even as He was speaking, the scorching sun of adversity was in the air above Him, and we have already heard of the plots against His life, and of the extreme malignity of the calumnies against Him. It was not to be a transient storm. Things were to go on as they had begun, and the persecution was soon to pass on from Himself to those who believed in Him, till at last he was to die by the hands of His enemies on the Cross, and the mere fact of being His adherent was to be enough to mark any one out for the most cruel treatment at the hands of His own nation. It was soon to be a matter of experience, that the seed which was to spring up from the sowing of the Gospel teaching would need deep roots and a soil in which it could fasten itself securely, for that it would be tried most severely by adversity and persecution.

The persecution which awaited the faithful disciples of our Lord in that country and nation was but a type and figure, so to say, of the difficulties which would always beset the following of Jesus Christ. For many centuries the world continued outwardly hostile to the Church, but even after that state of things ceased, and after the foundation of the Christian system of society, it was to be the same. That is, the practice of the precepts of our Lord, and much more of His counsels, could not be carried out without strong and well-grounded virtue, without the gifts of the Holy Ghost in the intelligence and in the heart, without charity and the love of God mastering the soul. The number, so to say, of skin-deep Christians may be greater or less, under particular states of external conditions in the Church, according to the relation in which she finds herself to the powers of the world, as it is easier to be a Catholic in England now than in the reign of James I., or to be a Christian in Japan now than in the reign of Taicosama. But the



external conditions of the Christian communities make little difference in the opposition between the spirit and the body, in the battle between sense and conscience, in the attractiveness and seductiveness of the world, in the charms of wealth and of earthly success, and in the poison of the cup of pleasure. The Christian must take up his cross, whether he lives in the days of persecution or in the days of peace, and as long as this remains true so long will it be true that many a seed is cast on stony ground, which will be infallibly withered by the scorching rays of the sun.

But when the seed has escaped the danger which is signified in the parable by the stony ground on which it has yet fallen, there yet remain other perils before it can be as fruitful as the intention and the care of the sower require. 'Others there are who are sown among thorns; these are they that hear the word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things, entering in, choke the Word, and it becometh fruitless.' They are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit. It appears that the thorns which are here spoken of are more probably brambles and briars, such as are used for hedges, as marks for the limits of property, and for the defence of the soil devoted to the good grain, and though perhaps cut down each year, they would spring up again at the ordinary time, and being of strong and rank growth, would soon outstrip the good grain and overtop it. Then such plants have a way of interlacing their shoots, so that at length they would form a sort of cage, under which the good seed would be stifled. This is the image which our Lord here uses for the description of that very large class of Christians who render to the good Sower so little return for the seed He has sown at so much cost, because their hearts are filled with the

cares and pleasures and ambitions and aims of this world. The description is in itself so graphic and so true as scarcely to require any further commentary, although one of the Fathers has said, that we should never have hit on the interpretation of the thorns which compares them to riches and pleasures, because these things have not in themselves anything that pricks like a thorn. Yet true experience shows how all these things are full of anxiety, when the mind dwells on them as objects of desire, and spends itself in schemes and contrivances for acquiring them. Our minds are too small to be occupied with many things at once, and therefore the mere devotion of our attention to these worldly matters is enough to hinder us from giving ourselves to the things of God, and this is the case even when men of high virtue find themselves in posts of importance, and obliged, by the duties of their state of life, to give the greater part of their time to such duties. And again, there is nothing soothing or satisfying even in the possession of these things, a possession which is always beset by uncertainty, always liable to a thousand dangers, and is a constant fret to the soul which has to attend to it.

But it is much more commonly the case that the cares of the world lead the soul actually away from God, because they tend to fix the affections and the desires of the heart upon these false goods, they tend to lead to unlawful aims and unlawful means of gaining those aims, to injustice, to fraud, to violence, to falsehood, and when these earthly goods have been acquired, they tend to fill the mind with pride and licentiousness, and so to the blinding and degradation of the soul by lusts of all kinds. Our Lord sketches the evil with a light hand, and spares the full details of the consequences of worldliness on the spiritual character. By doing this He sets before us the great truth, namely, that it is



sufficient for the heart and mind to be occupied with worldly things, in order to hinder the growth and fertility of the good seed. Even if these things could be made the chief objects of life without leading to positive violations of the law of God, the simple occupation of the mind with them would act as the network of briars acts on the shoots of wheat that are inclosed and stunted beneath it. Our Lord has before Him the whole fruitful range of the Christian virtues, the manifold fertility of the gifts of grace and of the Holy Ghost in the human soul, that immense richness of yield of which our nature is capable under the influences of grace, and He warns us that this fertility cannot be under the circumstances of which He is speaking. ‘The Word becometh fruitless, they yield no fruit’—terrible words indeed for the Christian to hear concerning himself, when he has the faith which tells him of the endless glories and riches of the eternal kingdom, all of which are to be acquired here and now, and can never be acquired at all unless the precious seed of which our Lord is the Sower takes deep root and fructifies in the heart.

Finally, our Lord turns to the other side of the picture, the side which was to His Sacred Heart the one sufficient consolation for all the disappointments of which He has before spoken. ‘These are they who are sown on the good ground, who hear the Word and receive and understand it and keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience, and yield the one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.’ The circumstances which are here mentioned with regard to the good soil seem to be selected with reference to the other instances already mentioned in which the seed has not been fruitful. To hear the word, to receive and to understand it, is just what has not been the case with the first class of the careless and inattentive hearers, out of whose hearts it is

the office of Satan to snatch the Word before it has a chance of becoming fruitful. Those who receive it and bear fruit, and those who are said to keep it and receive it, as St. Luke puts the words, 'in a good and very good heart,' are those in whom there are not that shallowness and want of solidity which are figured in the stony soil, nor those external hindrances to fruitfulness which are to be found in the ground in which the briars and thorns spring up alongside of the grain.

And again, beyond this distinction between the good soil and the bad, there is in the language of our Lord a very clear indication of the great variety of degrees in which the fertility of the good soil, as such, shows itself. For He says that one yields thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred-fold, and that all these bear fruit in patience, that is under the discipline and exercise of affliction and of the cross. It is clear that every word of this parable is meant to have its design, meaning, and importance, and that short as it is, it is intended to sketch for us to all time the variety of the results of grace, and especially of the apostolic preaching of the word. In the case of the fertility of the seed to which the Word of God is compared, it may be said that there is difference between seed and seed, not that all is not seed, but that one grain may have a more rich power of fructification than another, and in the same way, there may be differences even between one portion of earth and another, as to richness and fertility, and there may also be differences between the advantages of rain and sun and air, and the like external helps, in one case and in another. In the same way it may be with the souls of which our Lord speaks. The Word of God may fall on one favoured soul with an extraordinary power of light and influence, for God is not bound to give to all equally, but to all sufficiently. On the other hand, there may be differences



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in the readiness of the will, in the thorough generosity with which the soul surrenders itself to the influences of grace, or the vigour and energy which it applies to the cultivation in itself of what it has received. And again, there may be differences in the external conditions under which various souls correspond to the graces which they have received, conditions which depend on the good providence of God, as when one person has the advantage of living in the company of a saint, or in a home where every evil influence is carefully shut out, or where there are greater opportunities of profiting by the common means of grace, the sacraments of the Church, the preaching of the Word, and the like. In all these ways one good soul may have greater opportunities or greater faithfulness than another, and thus it is that the Kingdom of God is to be adorned by the fruits and flowers of sanctity not only in various kinds, but also in various degrees within the same kind.

## CHAPTER IX.

### *The Parable of the Cockle amid the Wheat.*

St. Matt. xiii. 24—28, 36—53 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 59—62.

OF the series of parables of which we are now speaking, there are two only which have been explained for us at length by our Lord Himself. These are the two first in order, and, as we may fairly conclude, those which He thus explained may have been considered by Him as of the very highest importance. Taken together, and with the rest, they present a very complete view of the conditions under which the Gospel teaching has to be carried on in the world, and they explain the principles of the Divine government in that teaching in a manner which it would have been difficult to ascertain so clearly, if we had not this distinct interpretation of the figures by our Lord Himself. It is well, therefore, to subjoin at once this parable, with its explanation, to the Parable of the Sower, and the interpretation of that parable given by our Lord. ‘Another parable He proposed to them, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field. But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way. And when the blade was sprung up, and had brought forth fruit, then appeared also the cockle. And the servants of the good man of the house coming said to him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it cockle? And he said to them,



an enemy hath done this. And the servants said to them; Wilt thou that we go and gather it up? And he said, No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it. Suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the cockle, and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn.'

This parable, then, was delivered to the multitudes, as well as to the disciples, and afterwards explained to the latter alone. 'Then having sent away the multitudes, He came to the house, and His disciples came to Him, saying, Expound to us the parable of the cockle of the field. Who made answer, and said to them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man. And the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the Kingdom, and the cockle are the children of the wicked one. And the enemy that soweth them is the devil. But the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Even as cockle therefore is gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all scandals and them that work iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

In the Parable of the Sower, our Lord had described Himself as content with a good deal of failure in the beneficent work which He had undertaken for mankind. He had intimated that He knew that much of the good seed which He came to sow would be wasted, and He had described the various manners in which that waste would be brought about. In some cases the seed was

to be snatched away by the devil, as the seed by the pathside is snatched up by the birds. In other cases, the seed was to fall as it were on stony ground, and wither away, the hearts in which it had been sown being too shallow and weak to give it strength enough to withstand temptation and trial. In other cases the souls in which the seed was sown would be engrossed by worldly cares and ambitions, by the love of riches and other temporal things, unsatisfying in themselves and unable to supply the soul with true happiness, but still attractive and deceitful enough to occupy the mind and heart to the exclusion of the true goods. In these cases the good seed would be stifled and made unfruitful. On the other hand, He was to find His reward and the recompense of His labours in the good seed which would spring up and return Him thirty for one, or sixty for one, or even a hundred for one.

Here, then, our Lord had said but little of the action of the evil one on the world. It is true He had given a most important lesson as to that action, for He had pointed out that the utter forgetfulness and inattention with which so many careless persons come to lose their opportunities, and to be as if they had never heard the good word, were due, not simply to their own recklessness, but to the direct action of the devil, taking the seed out of their hearts, whether by direct action on their memories, or by filling their minds with other thoughts and affections which were sufficient to exclude the thoughts of faith and religion and the work of grace. But for the remainder of the mishaps which were to prevent the fruitfulness of the seed, our Lord said nothing which could hint at the positive activity of the spirit of evil in the field which was sown by the word of God. There remained, therefore, these two great features in the description to be added by a new parable.



The first of these was the further action of the evil one which our Lord would permit, according to the general laws on which the universe is now governed, and the second was the manner in which God acts with regard to this action of His enemy. These two great features, then, form the special subject of this second parable.

In the Parable of the Sower, it will have been remarked that there is a transition from one point to another, in the use of the image, from the seed sown, to the persons in whose souls the seed is sown with so many diversities of issue, as to fruitfulness or the reverse. The seed is, the word of God, and yet the seed sown or dropped by the wayside are the heedless hearers, the seed sown among the thorns or on the stony ground are those who fail in this or that way to profit by the grace of God. So in the parable now before us, the seed is said to be the children of the kingdom and the children of the wicked one respectively, while the Son of Man sows the first and the evil one sows the other. This transfer of the image is necessary in this second parable, for in this there is question of the manner in which God will treat those who are occasions of evil and scandal in His Kingdom. The parable deals with persons rather than with things. But for the strict interpretation of the parable according to the lines of theological truth, we must remember the language of the Parable of the Sower, in which the seed is in the first instance the word of God, and in the second instance the persons in whom the word of God is sown. The devil has no power to create evil, and our Lord in His dealings with the world gives or offers graces to all. He does not create good souls, and leave evil souls to be created by His enemy. The parable speaks of the result of the action of our Lord on the one hand and of the action of Satan on the other, as being good

and evil men, but in the truth to which the parable corresponds the evil are not purely and originally evil, nor so absolutely corrupted as to be beyond hope of recovery, and the good are not so good as to be preserved from the possibility of becoming evil, although wheat cannot become cockle nor cockle wheat. What is permitted to the devil is to ape and imitate, as well as to thwart as far as lies in his power, the action of God.

Our Lord looked forward prophetically to the history of the Church—nor had He far to look, when He knew already that among His own chosen disciples there was one who would turn out a true child of the wicked one—and He saw that which would always be the marvel of His saints and the special cross of His dearest friends, that the field in which the Gospel seed was to be sown would, when the time came for the fruits of the sowing to become manifest to the outward eye, be found to be full of a growth which certainly was not of the Gospel. This is a phenomenon for which no account was furnished, as has been said, in the former parable, and our Lord represents it as a matter of surprise and complaint to the servants of the good master of the field. Who these servants are we are not distinctly told by our Lord, but the fact that the angels are said in the end of the parable to be the reapers is hardly sufficient to make us conclude that the angels are not also these good and zealous friends of their Master, Who would fain purge His field at once of the weeds which had so suddenly appeared. The unfolding of the Divine plan of the government of the world, and especially of the Church, is spoken of in Scripture as the great study of the angels, who have not by nature the knowledge of the future, and to whom the beautiful wisdom of God reveals itself gradually in the course of events.



And besides the angels, God has always among His servants on earth many who spend their days and nights in the prayerful contemplation of the progress of events in the world and in the Church, and to such also, far more even than to the angels, the phenomena of human history, and especially of that part of it which concerns the fortunes of the Catholic Church, are the subject and occasion of continual amazement and wondering surprise. The angels, no doubt, would willingly, if it were the will of God, exert their wonderful power in the destruction and removal at once of all scandals in the Church. And the chosen saints and servants of God yet upon earth, must burn with zeal at the sight of so much evil and so much mischief, and would gladly call down fire from Heaven, as Elias did, and as the two Apostles, the sons of Zebedee, would have done on an occasion mentioned in the Gospel history itself. For the desolation and ruin produced in the fair field of the Church by the evils of which our Lord speaks, are certainly enough to make the hearts of the friends of God boil over with indignation, and with desire for redress.

It is remarkable that in the parable itself the answer which our Lord puts into the mouth of the good householder is not simply, as might be supposed from the common version, 'an enemy hath done this,' but 'a man who is an enemy hath done this.' And when our Lord comes to explain the figure which He has used, He says simply the enemy is the devil. It may be that we are meant to understand, even from the language used by our Lord, that though the arch enemy and the principal agent in the attempted ruin of the fair harvest is the devil, still he acts mainly through the instrumentality of men. Another truth which may be conveyed by this language is, that the evil agencies are always posterior in date to the good agencies. The devil

sows over the ground which has already been sown by the Son of Man, he follows the lines and works over the work of God. The Fathers are very fond of understanding this parable, in a particular manner, of heresies, rather than of other evils, which proceed, like heresies, from the evil spirit and his subordinates, and according to this interpretation, it is very easy to see the force of this remark about the manner in which the evil one acts in spoiling the work of God. For all heresies are perversions of the truth, they require the truth of the Catholic doctrine as their foundation, they have no originality in themselves, and the devil their author has no creative power, he can but mar and distort and pull to pieces. But it is not necessary to confine the meaning of this great parable, in which the agency of the devil is described, to that single department of his work which issues in the production of heresies, and what is so plainly true of his procedure in this one part of his work, is also true of his work in other ways. He is essentially a copyist, a mimic of God, as if his insane thought that he would be as God was always repeating and forcing itself upon him, as the poor animals who ape man in his ways, are never quiet or happy, while they see him do anything, without attempting themselves to mimic him. The intense malignity of the character of Satan must not make us forget this feature in the same character—the feature of the most insane and foolish vanity, a feature very remarkable in those who have sold themselves to do his work in the world. One of the surest tests of the heretical spirit is the unwillingness to acknowledge mistakes and misrepresentations, when they are pointed out, and this unwillingness is founded on personal vanity. It may safely be said that a writer on the side of heresy or schism who shows any eagerness to acknowledge and correct the errors in statement into



which he has fallen, is already half converted. And yet the want of this simple honesty is one of the commonest characteristics of heretical controversialists, and it shows most clearly the spirit by which they are guided.

Another point may here be noticed. As God in His dealings with mankind acts according to His own infinite wisdom and knowledge of human nature, and so of all that it requires and of all that is adapted to influence it, and to supply its wants and cravings, the plan which He has followed in His Kingdom must of necessity cover the whole ground and penetrate every department of humanity. It is the plan of the enemy, therefore, to proceed on his own work of mischief wherever God has extended His own beneficent operations, and thus the work of the evil one is aptly described as the sowing of bad seed over the good seed which God has sown. This is said in the parable to have been done while men slept, and if this particular also is to have its counterpart in the truth, we must understand that our Lord refers to the necessity of the utmost vigilance on the part of those who are responsible for the good estate of the field sown by Him, and to the truth that the beginning of the activity of the evil influences is to be traced, more or less, to the want of watchfulness on the part of the rulers of the Church. This, however, may perhaps be pressing the figure too far, for nothing is said in the explanation of the parable by our Lord of this want of vigilance. It may be that He means us to understand that there is always a great deal going on in the unseen world around us, and with direct reference to ourselves and to the welfare or ruin of our souls, of which we can have no more perception than men can have of what goes on in the hours in which they are naturally wrapt up in sleep.

These few words, then, of our Lord, ‘an enemy hath

done this,' contain the whole of what He tells us here of the ever active and most malicious exertions of the evil one and his emissaries for the purpose of destroying the good work which God has begun in the world. As the enemy passes over the field in which the footsteps of the sower of the good seed have gone before him, and leaves no part of that field unvisited and, as far as lies in him, unspoiled by the seeds of evil, such we must suppose our Lord means us to consider is the activity of the enemy in scattering his evil influences wherever our Lord has left behind Him the principles of good. Alas ! it is but too true that there is no part of the field to which Satan is forbidden to penetrate. Nothing is too sacred for him to befoul. It is natural enough to expect his work in those regions of society which are more especially under his influence, which we call, by pre-eminence, 'the world,' the mass of those who worship temporal goods and aims, and regulate their conduct by the maxims of time and not by those of eternity. But the work of the enemy is not only here. It is to be found in the sanctuary itself. The Church of God is provided by the care of its Founder with an admirably organized hierarchy, a complete army of selected souls, vowed especially to the service of the altar, to the life of prayer, to the ministration of the sacraments, to the government of the general body, to the defence of the true doctrine, and to the preaching of the Word of God. It is Satan's chiefest joy and greatest triumph when he can sow seeds of evil in the sanctuary and around the altar of God, and though he has never been allowed for long together, or to any overwhelming extent, to corrupt the ruling body and fill the sees of Christendom with prelates who might be described as legitimate successors rather of Annas and Caiaphas, than of the Twelve Apostles, still he has not been altogether without his



successes in this most vital assault on the good work of God. Incalculable as have been the services to the Church of God of the great majority of her chief rulers, her history would be different indeed from what it is if the world had never been able to intrude its own children into their ranks. Pride, vanity, worldliness, personal ambition, jealousy, avarice, nepotism, an indolent and a luxurious life—if such scandals as these had never been in the sanctuary of the Church, she might not at this moment have to lament the falling away of so many fair kingdoms which once owned her gentle sway. As a matter of fact, the greater number of heresies and schisms in the Church have had their origin in the clerical order itself, and in many cases they have arisen among ecclesiastics of the highest rank.

If Satan has been allowed to see the evil shoots manifest themselves in the very highest orders of the hierarchy, it is not wonderful that in other parts of the field of the good householder the same miserable enjoyment should not have been denied to him. The enclosed garden of religious life, the cultivated retreat in which evangelical counsels are made the rule of daily practice under the sanction of vows, this also has been invaded by the malignity of the evil one, and the souls most immediately consecrated to God have sometimes been the occasions of the greatest triumphs to His enemy. As the ecclesiastical state has its own peculiar temptations, such as those which have been enumerated, so also are there found, among the religious communities, the seeds of evil particularly fatal in their case. So again it has been in that other garden of beauty and fruitfulness in virtue, the holy domestic life of the Christian family, formed on the model of the holy home at Nazareth, and the cares of a household and the lawful worldly callings to which the members of such families are naturally de-

voted, have been the occasion of a thousand seductions and of a thousand instances of forgetfulness of God. Not a calling, not a profession, not a pursuit, from the most laborious scientific investigations to the simplest relaxations and recreations, into which some evil seed has not been cast, as it were, to occupy the ground. The whole of society may be looked on as a field sown by the hand of God and intended to return to Him the fair fruit of obedience to His law and glorification of His bounties and benefits to man. And yet every department has its evil traditions and examples and principles asserted against those of God and of our Lord, nor can there be any truer picture either of the natural society of man or of the supernatural kingdom of the Church, than that which our Lord here gives, the picture of a field covered with two growths of seed side by side, the one good, the other evil.

This, then, is the chief part, so to say, of the parable, the declaration on the part of our Lord as to what was to be expected in the field in which the evangelical labourers were to spend their work—a picture true indeed of the history of the world before He came and before the foundation of the Gospel kingdom, but far more true prophetically, as a forecast, for the benefit and warning of the Apostles and those who were to come after them in their work for God. For the true picture of the state of the world before the times of redemption might perhaps have more properly been said to be that of a field in which there was but, here and there, a faint trace of the Divine culture, a few shoots of good wheat among a forest of shoots of cockle. But it was all the more surprising, after the work of our Lord and after the establishment of His Church, that even in that chosen field so carefully cultivated and fenced round, there were still to be these many shoots of the evil seed



in every department and in every corner. Our Lord knew what was in man, as it is said of Him by St. John. He did not need the experience, even of His own reception at the hands of the chosen nation, to show Him what was to be expected by His Church at the hands of the world: But He knew also what was in Satan, and He knew how intense would be the fresh activity into which the enemy of God and man would be roused by his defeat and by the destruction of his kingdom and power in the world. He knew how he would fasten on all the weak points in man, and work all the lower influences of his nature against his own good, all the more zealously because he would see, in the new creation of the Church, a world capable of giving far more glory to God than that former natural world which he had been allowed to deface and to turn into a dominion of his own. And the whole process of the efforts of Satan in the Church and their issue is summed up in these few words of our Lord, 'an enemy hath done this.'

The enemy, then, of God and man will not be excluded from making his malignant attempts on the fair field of the Church, as he was not prevented from assailing the beautiful and innocent creation of God when man was first made. The evil which sin has introduced into man remains in the Kingdom of God as long as the time of probation lasts, that is, the conflict of the flesh and the spirit is to go on even in regenerate man, although immense forces of grace have been supplied to him for his easy victory in the conflict. And so neither is the activity of the evil spirits fettered or put an end to, though men are wonderfully stronger for resistance against these deadly enemies than they were before the coming of our Lord. As a consequence of these two truths, the field of the world in which the

good seed has been sown is to be still what it always was, a field in which good and evil grow up side by side, nor is there to be any part of it in which the work of the evil one is not to be rewarded by a kind of miserable success of its own. But then, the question rises up—it must certainly have risen up in the minds of the angels as they watched the progress of the Gospel Kingdom—how will God deal with the evil shoots which have covered so large a space on this field which He has sown and is to be continually sowing? When evil sprang up in Heaven, God did not tolerate it. The evil shoots were uprooted at once and cast away. Even in the history of His dealings with man, the principle of swift vengeance and extermination has not unfrequently been followed. Once the whole race of man was destroyed, except eight persons, and there had been other instances of summary chastisements, only less signal than that. What is to be the law of God's action in the government of His Church, or of the world into which He has sent forth His Church?

The answer to this question is contained in the reply of the householder to the servants who volunteer to go at once and root up the cockle. 'Wilt thou that we go and gather it up? And he said, No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it. Suffer both to grow together till the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the cockle, and bind it in bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn. The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. Even as cockle is therefore gathered up, and burnt with fire, so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity, and shall cast them out into the furnace of fire;



there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.'

It is remarkable, in the first place, as to this answer of the householder in the parable, that our Lord in His explanation does not give any commentary which answers directly to the words, 'lest gathering up the cockle you root up the wheat also together with it.' He dwells mainly on the final separation, and on the fate of the cockle, gathered into bundles to be burned, as if it was more important to enforce on the minds of His hearers the truth of the final chastisement of the scandalous and the wicked, than that other truth of their toleration in His Kingdom, and of the reason which is given for that toleration. He seems almost to take it for granted as a thing not to be wondered at, that there should be scandals which are not at once eradicated, and to wish to point more forcibly to the future destruction of all offences and the thorough purgation of the Kingdom. For the toleration of evil is a principle already established in His government of the world, and therefore it was not to be expected that any change in this principle should be made as long as that human world goes on in its present provisional state. But in the former parable He had said nothing of the future judgment. He had spoken simply of the various causes of the sterility or failure or fertility of the good seed, as if there had been no responsibility for all these various issues on the part of those in whose hearts the seed had been sown. This new feature in the whole picture, therefore, was yet to be supplied. But in the second place, although our Lord's own commentary seems thus to leave aside the reason assigned for the refusal of the householder to consent to the immediate rooting up of the cockle, it cannot be wrong for us to suppose that

there are Divine reasons for that toleration of the evil shoots which is the characteristic of the present providence of God. Thus we find the Fathers of the Church explaining for us in more than one way the words of the householder on which we are now engaged.

We may insist, however, so far on the silence of our Lord, with regard to the meaning of this first part of the answer of the householder, as to see in it the truth that one prominent reason for the forbearance which is inculcated on the servants, lies in the certainty of the future retribution on all that can cause scandal or offence in the Kingdom of God. The punishment is only delayed, the perfect purgation of the field of God is only put off for a while. That being the case, it remains for the prudent householder to deal with the cockle as he thinks best in his own interest, that is, in the interest of the wheat. For the sake of the wheat it is that the cockle is to be spared awhile. If the cockle is rooted up, the wheat may suffer. It may be rooted up with the cockle. In the growth of which the seed is the Word of God, in the growth in which the good seed are the children of the Kingdom, it is quite clear that a reason exists which cannot be expressed in the same image which is here used by our Lord. For cockle cannot become wheat, nor can wheat become cockle. But the good can become bad, and the bad can become good. Thus, the immediate rooting up of the cockle might have cost our Lord the souls of such saints as St. Magdalene and St. Paul. And it is a part of the chief duties of the servants of God in the Apostolical ministry to be constantly labouring, in the spirit of the Good Shepherd, to turn the cockle into the wheat.

But, apart from this reason, one which could not be expressed in this parable by our Lord without a change of imagery, there are sufficient reasons assigned by the



Fathers for the toleration of the cockle by the side of the wheat, even if the cockle is never, by conversion, to become the wheat. For the existence even of scandals and heresies and divisions among the subjects of the Church is of use, as the Apostle says,<sup>1</sup> in order to the manifestation of the faithfulness of those who are faithful. Too many bright examples of suffering heroically for the sake of God would be lost, if He were to interfere by an exercise of His power in the destruction of the rebellious and the schismatical. Again, the presence of the wicked, and even of the scandalous, in the body of the faithful, is a constant stimulus to the virtue of the faithful. It gives them great objects to pray for, and to toil for before God. It also makes them watchful over themselves, and so must secure their virtue in many cases in which they might fall through negligence if there were nothing to warn them. Again, the wicked and the authors and abettors of heresies, are often singularly active and devoted in the pursuit of the objects which they have at heart, and in this way also they serve as spurs and examples to the children of the Kingdom. In another way also the tolerance of the wicked on the part of God is of immense use to the children of the Church. For if it were not so ordained in His Providence that those who sin against Him should be spared, it would follow that all who are spared are in a state of grace, and might feel confident of their own safety. Nothing would be more mischievous than this, for it would breed immense and false security, as much almost as if people could feel certain beforehand of their own perseverance, and of their dying a good death. These things are left uncertain by God for the sake of the elect, and if He did not leave the cockle in the field until the end this merciful design of His would be defeated.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 19.

Our Lord is speaking of the Providence of God by which the economy of redemption is governed, and which can afford to wait for the time of inflicting punishment, because it has all times at its disposal. This seems to be the answer to the objection against the discipline of the Church, which has sometimes been founded on this parable, as if it were contrary to the rule here laid down by our Lord for the rulers of the Church to punish, in the manner in which punishment is within their power, those who give public scandal in the Church, or in other ways violate her laws. The discipline of the Church is both corrective of the offenders whom she punishes, and also wisely ordered for the common benefit. Our Lord Himself gave instructions as to those who would not obey the Church, that they were to be treated as heathens and as publicans.<sup>2</sup> St. Paul forbade the Corinthians to hold intercourse with those Christians who were guilty of certain sins, and enjoined on them the excommunication of the incestuous person.<sup>3</sup> In his First Epistle to St. Timothy he mentions Hymeneus and Alexander, whom he says he has delivered to Satan, that is, excommunicated.<sup>4</sup> And in those early times it seems to have been no uncommon thing for excommunicated persons to have been actually possessed by the devil after the sentence of the Church. And there are other passages in the New Testament which seem to bear witness to the very early introduction of the salutary discipline of which we speak. The uprooting which is, in this parable, deferred by the order of the householder is that which is to take place inevitably in the Last Day. And as the last day to each soul is the day of its own death, it may in particular cases be anticipated by the infliction of sudden death by the judgment of God.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matt. xviii. 17.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. v. 4, 11.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. i. 20.



Such was the case with the first great scandal in the Church, in the instance of Ananias and Sapphira, who were slain by the visitation of God as soon as St. Peter had passed on them his sentence of condemnation.

The question of the punishment of heretics by a Christian state is not the same as that of the ecclesiastical use of disciplinary punishment. For in the Christian system of civil government, the crime of heresy is a crime against the common good, and not only against the spiritual order. The arguments drawn from this parable against the Donatist and Novatian heretics by the Fathers who were engaged in those controversies, cannot be questioned. But they only go to prove that the visible Church contains the evil as well as the good, which was what those sectaries denied, not that there is no such crime as heresy or schism which may be punished by the Church as treason and rebellion are punished by the State. It is still true that, even in the administration of these remedies in the cases just now mentioned, the Church is extremely careful lest the one great end of the benefit of the faithful should be endangered. For she often forbears to use her powers, when she sees that the use of them may do harm rather than good, and provoke a more formal rebellion instead of correcting an evil which is but in its infancy. This is probably one reason why formal excommunications are so comparatively rare in modern times, when the authorities of the Church have reason for thinking that the mass of the population in some Catholic country will not be able to take its own part in carrying out the sentence. For in that case others, besides the direct offenders against whom the sentence is hurled, will be involved in sin from which they would otherwise be free. In such cases the Church is fain to dissemble, and be as if she did not hear or see, rather than hurry on a catastrophe which

may involve thousands of her children in the danger of the loss of their souls by disobedience to her plain commands.

Some things remain to be noticed by way of conclusion with regard to the explanation of this parable by our Lord. In the first place, He describes the angels as sent forth by the Son of Man, who are to gather out of His Kingdom all scandals and them that work iniquity. For whether the field in which the seed is sown be considered as the world or as the Church, as it may be considered to be either, in different aspects of the same truth, it is in each case the Kingdom of the Son of Man, the Kingdom which belongs to Him by virtue of His Incarnation, the Kingdom which He has conquered back to Himself by His Passion, and which has been given to Him in His glorious Resurrection. Thus, even if it were true that at the end of time the scandalous and the workers of iniquity were to be found the majority, still they would be gathered out of His Kingdom as intruders and invaders, and the just would remain therein as in their true home and heritage. Thus we need not press too far the apparent argument which may be drawn from these words as to the comparative numbers of the just and the unjust. The words of our Lord seem to refer to His former words in the Sermon on the Mount, where He had said that He would say in the Last Day to many who would claim to have prophesied in His name, and in His name cast out devils and done many wonderful works, that He knew them not, 'Depart from Me, you that work iniquity.'

Again, it is clear that He here distinguishes between two kinds of evil which shall be alike eradicated in His Kingdom, the evil of open scandal and the evil of the working of iniquity, which may not be open to the eyes of men but which is open to the eye of God. Such was



the case of the workers of iniquity of whom He had spoken in the Sermon on the Mount, as just quoted. Again, it has been noted by some writers on this parable, that the cockle is to be bound in bundles to be burnt, as if our Lord would turn our thoughts to the accurate discrimination, even in the punishments as in the rewards of the next world, and to remind us that sinners of similar kinds will be punished together, as they are represented in the great Christian poem of the middle ages. And it is also remarkable that our Lord adds to the description of the burning of the wicked in the furnace of fire, the words, 'then shall the just shine as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.' Such words imply that in the future state of blessedness there shall be no concealment of virtue and spiritual beauty, whereas in the present state of things we are not only unable to see such glories as are interior to the soul, but also we are hindered, by the companionship of the bad with the good, and the consequent corruption of public opinion, from recognizing even those excellencies and perfections in virtue which would be not altogether beyond the ken of the discernment of which we are at present masters, if it were not for the overclouding of the good by the presence of the bad.

But the greatest cause of that manifestation of the just and of their spiritual beauty, which will then take place, will be the new state and condition in which all will live who have a share in that blessed Kingdom of the Father. For in that state there will be no longer any concealment of hearts and minds, but the whole interior of the soul of each one of the citizens of Heaven will be laid open to all. This manifestation will have begun at the Day of Judgment, one of the great features of which will be the opening of all consciences and of all lives, as well as of the dealings of God with all and the gifts

which He has bestowed upon each. This itself will be enough to furnish the blessed dwellers in Heaven with matter for thanksgiving to God and for perpetual contemplation and enjoyment. It will be the laying open of the full knowledge of an universe far more splendid and magnificent and various in its beauties than the physical universe, the knowledge of which is capable of imparting to us intellectual enjoyments of the rarest and highest kind. It is not surprising that the Sacred Heart of our Lord should have led Him here to touch on this point, which must be the source of endless delight to Him. He seems to touch on it here, rather for the purpose of encouragement, and as if to promise to those who shall remain faithful under the disadvantages of the present mixture of evil with good in the world, a reward which will more than compensate to them for all they may have had to endure. And perhaps the words also include the thought that the splendours of the virtue of the just in the future Kingdom of God, will be enhanced rather than diminished by the obscuration and persecution which they have had to undergo, for their virtue will have been made perfect in patience and thus the glory of their crowns increased. There is something of the same connection to be observed in the passage in the Prophet Daniel, which was probably in the mind of our Lord as He spoke this parable. ‘Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always. But they that are learned’—that is, just—‘shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that instruct many to justice as stars for all eternity.’<sup>5</sup> And our Lord seems to have wished to lead the Apostles, to whom He was explaining the parable, to dwell much in thought on the great reward

<sup>5</sup> Daniel xii. 3.



thus promised to them, and to make the glory of the blessed, both in body and soul, a great motive for exertion and faithfulness in their service to His Father. For He adds here again, as if for them specially, His familiar exhortation, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

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## CHAPTER X.

### *The Light on the Candlestick.*

St. Mark iv. 21—25 ; St. Luke viii. 16—18.

It has been well to subjoin the explanations given by our Lord of the two great parables of the Sower and of the Cockle, to the parables themselves. But as a matter of fact, the explanations were not given at the same time with the parables. And it is not certain that other parables, of which the explanation is left to ourselves in the Gospel history, were not delivered to the people by our Lord before the time came when He was alone in the evening with His disciples. The order of St. Mark, which is usually so accurate in point of chronological sequence, leads us to think that some words of our Lord to His disciples, spoken after the explanations on which we have been dwelling, are to be considered in this place, rather than at the end of the whole account of the first series of parables. And we may therefore pause at this point for the sake of so considering them, although it cannot be a matter, either of great certainty or of the utmost importance, that the words in question were spoken just at this point. They have their own importance in showing us still more clearly the desire of our Lord to make the truths of which He had been

speaking sink very deeply into the minds of the disciples. Thus they are most valuable, from the connection which they have with the main object of our Lord in this stage of the formation of the Apostles for their great work in the Church.

‘And He said unto them,’ we are told by St. Mark, ‘Doth a candle come in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick? No man lighting a candle covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it upon a candlestick, that they who come in may see the light. For there is nothing hid, which shall not be made manifest, neither was it made secret, but that it may come abroad. If any man have ears to hear let him hear.’ These words, like so many other sayings of our Lord, would be a parable, if only the parabolic form had been given to them. And they were spoken, not to the multitudes, but to the disciples in their intimate communion with Him. They may be considered as conveying a lesson which follows naturally on the parables already delivered, but is addressed especially to those chosen friends who had been privileged to hear the explanation of those parables from His own lips. They speak clearly of the duties of the Apostles with regard to these truths set forth in the parables. They had the mysteries of the Kingdom explained to them, or rather, we may say, in the first intention of our Lord, they had been considered as capable of perceiving them for themselves, through the parabolic veil which made them less intelligible to others. For when our Lord began to explain the parables to them, He expressed a kind of surprise that the explanation was needed by them. But they were not to suppose that the truths thus explained were for themselves only, or that they had a right to any esoteric doctrines of the Kingdom, which were to be denied



to others less favoured. The instructions which they received were not imparted to others, for the reasons already given, namely, that they were unfit for their reception, and had brought on themselves the punishment of being treated with greater reserve in the teaching of the Gospel truths. If they had been fit for these truths which were now veiled from them, though not entirely denied to them, the truths would have been set before them without the parabolic veil. The Apostles had been instructed more fully. But this was not for themselves alone. It was that they might communicate to others in due time the truths which were to be veiled from the populations of Galilee and afterwards of Judæa. Thus, if our Lord explained these parables to them, it was for the sake of others as well as of themselves, for the sake of the thousands and millions of Christians all over the world, who were to be their spiritual children throughout successive generations. He speaks as if He were contemplating His own work in them, rejoicing in it, and explaining it to them that they might understand it and cooperate with it better.

He then it is Who has lighted up the candle of the knowledge of the mysteries in the Apostles. He certainly has not done this for the sake of hiding it, putting it out of the way, as a thing is put away in houses where there is little room to spare, under a bushel measure, which would easily hold useless articles, or under a bed where old lumber is often stored. No, the object which He has had in lighting it is that all who come in may see the light. He had already spoken of them as the light of the world, in the Sermon on the Mount. But there, as it seems, he had more directly in His mind the light which they would give by their example, in the practice of the virtues of the Beatitudes. Here He is speaking of them rather as the doctors and

teachers of the world. For He goes on to assure them that all that He has told them in private is for the public good. There is nothing hid which shall not be made manifest, neither was it made secret, but that it may be known and come abroad. The Christian religion has no hidden secrets, as such, although there are in it many mysteries which are not to be forced on those who are unfit to receive them. The only reason against the immediate publication of all that it contains to all, lies in the danger which arises from the unfitness of so many for Divine truths. Now as to this He had already given His precept, that the holy things were not to be given to dogs, nor the pearls cast before swine. But the time might come when men would become more fit, and if some are unfit, others may be turned to who are fit. And thus the whole beautiful system of spiritual truth is to be revealed and proclaimed, not kept hidden and jealously guarded, according to the precept which He was to give to the Apostles very soon after this occasion, and in which the words of this passage are repeated: 'Nothing is covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid that shall not be known. That which I tell you in the dark, speak ye in the light, and that which you hear in the ear, preach ye upon the housetops.'<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to see that there might have been inconvenience or danger in setting before the people at that time these very mysteries of the Kingdom which are conveyed in these two first Parables. In the first place, they referred to the ill-success of much of the Gospel preaching on account of certain defects in the hearers, or in their circumstances. There was the danger of the ceaseless activity of the evil spirits, the danger of the shallowness and frivolity of many, the danger of the

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. x. 26, 27.



cares and interests of worldly pursuits and engagements, even though not blameable in themselves, the danger of riches, and the like. The Gospel Kingdom was not to march on from triumph to triumph, without labour or danger to those who were its children. Nay, it was to be a Kingdom in which evil men were to be mixed up with good men, in which it would be difficult to discern evil from good, in which an immense amount of good would be hindered, or at least stunted, by the contact of its contrary. This picture might be too discouraging for weak souls. As a matter of history, the great failures and miseries of the Church have always come from the worldliness or unfitness of her children, whether laymen or ecclesiastics, from their want of fervour, their want of charity, their mutual jealousies, their hateful selfishness, and consequent divisions. The failure of Christians to correspond to the graces of their vocation is the one most fruitful cause of the comparative ill-success of the Church in her work in the world. It prevents her work of conversion, it encourages doubts as to her Divine mission. It is on account of this that the heathen turn away from the Gospel, that sinners die unreconciled, that revolts abound against authority, that heresies flourish, that schisms tear the seamless robe of unity. It is a mischief especially dangerous to those young in the faith and weak in virtue. It is a wound over which saints mourn in silence, and which the most devoted children of the Church would fain conceal, at the cost of their blood, even when they cannot alleviate it. No wonder, then, that our Lord did not proclaim it to the people. He more than once disclosed the pain which it gave to His Heart. But His words on this subject are few, and carefully tender. It was very necessary that the founders of the Church should be aware of this great danger, but it was not as

yet to be spoken of. The preaching of the moral doctrine involved in these two first parables would require great authority and fearlessness on the part of the teachers, and a readiness on the part of the hearers to receive stern admonitions and the whole doctrine of the Cross.

There is no point, however, of this moral and spiritual doctrine which we do not find developed by the Apostles in the later books of the New Testament. The activity of Satan and the evil spirits in frustrating the growth of the good seed is described in more than one passage by St. Paul, to whom Satan is 'the prince of the power of this air,'<sup>2</sup> and his associates, 'the rulers of the world of this darkness, the spirits of wickedness in the high places,'<sup>3</sup> and he draws out a magnificent picture of the Christian armament against them. St. Peter changes the image, but only for another which represents the devil as 'a roaring lion who goes about, seeking whom he may devour.'<sup>4</sup> The heedlessness of so many in whose souls the Word can take no root is most graphically described in a few words by St. James. 'If a man be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his natural countenance in a glass, for he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was.'<sup>5</sup>

There are many passages in St. Paul in which he warns us against levity and shallowness, which was a fault in the Corinthian Church. But nowhere does he more plainly remind us of these parables than when he is warning the Hebrew Christians against the danger of apostasy, on account of the trials to which they were subjected. 'For the earth that drinketh in the rain which cometh upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet

<sup>2</sup> Ephes. ii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ephes. vi. 12.

<sup>4</sup> 1 St. Peter v. 8.

<sup>5</sup> St. James i. 23.



for them by whom it is tilled, receiveth blessing from God, but that which bringeth forth thorns and briars is rejected, and very near to a curse, whose end is to be burnt.’<sup>6</sup> It would almost seem as if there was here a distinct reference to our Lord’s words about those who, when tribulation and persecution arise because of the Word, are scandalized and fall away. There are traces throughout the whole history of the Acts, and in many of the Epistles, trials akin to those to which the Christians of Jerusalem were exposed. St. Paul speaks in more than one place of his own persecuting fury, and we gather from his words that many Christians were put to death, others imprisoned and beaten in the synagogues, and others compelled to blaspheme.<sup>7</sup> It is clear from the whole tone of the Epistles to the Hebrews that there was much danger of apostasy among those to whom it was written. Here, then, we have the prediction contained in one part of the parable of the Sower fulfilled to the letter. Nor can there be any more plain commentary on our Lord’s words about the deceitfulness of riches, than the words of the same Apostle to St. Timothy. ‘They that will become rich fall into temptations and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful devices, which drown men in destruction and perdition, for covetousness is the root of all evils, which some desiring have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.’<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, the whole history of the Acts, and a great many passages of the Epistles, bear witness to the importance of the doctrine inculcated on the future rulers of the Church by our Lord, with reference to the existence of heresies, of parties in the Church, and the mixture of evil with good even within the fold. At

<sup>6</sup> Heb. vi. 7, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xxvi. 11.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy vi. 9, 10.

the distance of time from the foundation of the Church at which we live, and with the history of the Christian centuries before us, we take these things as natural and inevitable in the Church and in Christian society. But it does not follow that they were not surprises to the first generation of Christians, or that the Apostles had not the greatest possible reason for rejoicing in the warnings to them conveyed in this part of our Lord's teaching. It must be remembered that the whole system of the Gospel preaching was something new in the world. There had been nothing like it before, and the conditions under which it was to be carried on were consequently unknown. When these conditions came to be ascertained by experience, as was the case within the lifetime of the Apostles themselves, it was very profitable indeed for those who had to administer the system to be able to recognize the perfect foreknowledge of them which was here manifested by our Lord, implying, as it did, a direction to them to turn their efforts to the obviating or removing of the various evils on which He set His mark.

There seems to be good reason for thinking that when our Lord speaks of all that is hid being made known, He was more directly thinking of moral and practical instructions—such, for instance, as the Evangelical Counsels, and the like. Still His words naturally extend to the office of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, of unfolding, more and more fully, as time flows on, the treasures of dogmatic truth which are contained in the original deposit of the faith. This is the chief sphere and field of the great principle of development in the Church. Our Lord does not say that all things are to be made manifest, and preached on the housetops, at once, but that all the details, whether of practical or dogmatical instruction, which



have been confided to the Church are, in the end, each at its due time, to be made known in the light of day. It is impossible to think otherwise, when we remember that at the very time when He was using this image of the candlestick, and insisting on the manifestation of all secrets, He was setting forth a large number of most important truths in such a manner, and with the avowed purpose, that they might be understood by some of His hearers and not understood by others. The passage, therefore, before us, taken together with the circumstances of our Lord's teaching at this time, bears clear witness to the principle of the gradual unfolding of Christian truths, whether practical or dogmatical, by the prudence and charity of the Church. And perhaps it may have been with the design of leading them to thoughtful reflection on the application of this principle that He again added His warning precept, 'If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.'

Our Lord goes on to add some precepts as to the carefulness with which the Apostles were to avail themselves of the precious privileges which it was their lot to enjoy, of hearing His teaching. He said to them, 'Take heed what you hear, take heed therefore how you hear.' The ears by means of which the mysteries of the Kingdom were to be received, were the spiritual ears of the soul, strengthened and quickened by special graces for the reception of these hidden truths. Nothing could be more miserable than to have gifts of this kind, and not to use them. And yet our Lord's warning could not be unnecessary. For Judas was among these favoured twelve. So in all ages of the Church there must have been a large number of souls, highly favoured by God, who have nevertheless, through their own carelessness and want of correspondence to grace, or by dallying with some dangerous temptation, failed to catch

the Divine message by which they might have delighted and edified the Kingdom of God on earth. The prophet Balaam, in the Old Testament, who speaks of himself as 'the hearer of the words of God, who hath beheld the vision of the Almighty,'<sup>9</sup> fell as Judas fell, by the sin of avarice. This was a case of a man who had ears to hear, not caring to hear, on account of an evil passion. But our Lord's words further imply the injunction of a twofold diligence, first, the consideration of what it is that is revealed in His Divine doctrine, that is, of the dignity and sublimity of the truths which are imparted to us, and then, also, of the manner in which these heavenly boons are to be received, 'the reverence, the humility, the attention, the purity of motive, with which they are to be listened to and taken into the heart, there to be cherished and fed upon by meditation.

And He adds further, that in this subject-matter also there will be room for the application of that most just principle of God in His dealings with us, that with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again. This principle He had, not long before, insisted on in the Sermon on the Plain, as, in an earlier stage of His teaching, in the Sermon on the Mount. There it had been applied to our dealings with others, whether in judgment or in action, and now we are told that it will be used also with reference to our conduct in the reception of Divine truths. If we receive them faithfully, intelligently, diligently, other higher and further revelations will succeed to them. As soon as we have made one series of truths our own, another more beautiful and grander will be offered to us. And on the other hand, God will not go on imparting His lights to us, unless we use reverently what He has already bestowed

<sup>9</sup> Numbers xxiv.



upon us. This was exactly the reason why the people of Galilee in general were to be treated with greater reserve for the future by Him, because they had not mastered the teaching which they had already received. The disciples, and all those whom they represented in the Church, were to be warned lest the same thing should befall themselves. 'For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, that also which he hath, which he thinketh he hath, shall be taken away.' There is, then, no more sure method of obtaining greater spiritual lights and favours, than faithfulness in the use of those which we already have. There is no limit to the riches of God, nor is there any limit to His desire to impart them to us according to His own good pleasure. Nothing delights Him more than to give us great gifts, and though all souls are not equal in their natural capacities, the capacity of each is immense. But there are but few who do not hinder God, by their own carelessness and folly, from giving to them far more largely than they receive.

And, on the other hand, our Lord's concluding words show us another truth. This is that it is possible to have and not to have at the same time, that is, to have in one way, and yet as to all profit from the possession, not to have, or only to seem or think to have, in another. For a truth may lie in the memory unheeded and unused, the relic of a former state of greater fervour and enlightenment, and thus the soul may be said to possess it and yet not to possess it. It may be said, that as long as it is there at all, it may possibly still be made profitable, though at the last. So it is with many a poor soul who has been educated religiously, and then abandoned the practice of religion, to fall into a state of chronic sin. In such cases there is often a wakening up of old feelings and religious instincts which

have almost died out, and by means of that dormant truth the soul is able to make its peace with God before it is too late. There are many such souls indeed, by the good mercy of God set in motion by the power of prayer. But it cannot but be true that for one case of this kind, there are many more in which the truths which the soul has received in Christian or Catholic education are altogether inefficacious at the last, even when death is plainly at hand, and the world and its false goods are seen to be vanishing away. The dying sinner, it may be, was once a Catholic child, and as such he knew of old how to set his conscience in order, to grieve for and confess his sins, to seek the aid of the Church in the last sacraments. All in vain! he dies as he has lived, no ray of light penetrates the darkness of his soul, that little which he had or thought he had—for such persons, in life, often delude themselves by the promise that they will make all right at the last—that little is taken away from him. We often hear of the cases in which God has been so wonderfully merciful, as to give the habitual sinner, or the confirmed heretic or rebel against the Church, grace of conversion at the last. We hear of many, and there must be many more of which we do not hear. But who can count up the cases in which even that which such persons seem to have is taken away from them?



## CHAPTER XI.

### *The Seed growing of itself.*

St. Mark iv. 26—29 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 60.

THE Parable of the Cockle, of which we have last been speaking, is related by no one of the Evangelists except St. Matthew, who is, of the four, by far the most full in his reports of this kind of teaching on the part of our Lord. The reason of this is that he is far more full than the others in his reports of the teaching of our Lord in general, as distinguished from His miracles on the one hand, and from His disputations on the other. But even St. Matthew has omitted the parable of which we have now to speak, which followed next in order on the last. This, then, we owe to the faithful memory of St. Peter, under whose guidance the second Gospel was put together by St. Mark. There is something about the teaching of this particular parable which may have struck congenially on the peculiar temperament of the mind of the chief Apostle. For it was in his mind above all others that the gradual process of enlightenment went on, under the guidance of the good providence of the Father, which issued, in no long period of time after this, in his memorable confession of faith in the Divinity of our Lord. The gradual ripening and unfolding of the good seed in his heart may fairly be cited as an instance of that power of fructification in the Word of God, of which our Lord is here speaking. And thus we might consider that St. Peter, in his care to preserve this particular parable for the

Church of all generations, was instinctively putting on record the blessed process which had gone on in his own loyal heart.

In any case, the parable which is now to be given follows most naturally and beautifully on the two already explained by our Lord Himself. For it may be said, indeed, to grow out of the second parable as that had grown out of the first. For, in the Parable of the Sower our Lord had only hinted at the action of the evil one in the world, saying that it was he who caught away the good seed out of the hearts of the careless hearers, and then He had gone on, in the second parable, to say a great deal more about the positive action of the evil spirit in directly propagating his wicked teaching, and the manner in which this action of his was dealt with by God. In this second parable our Lord had spoken of the seed as cast into the ground, and then, after a time, coming up and showing whether it was good wheat or only cockle, and He had described the growth of the two, side by side, until the harvest, without speaking of any exertions on the part of the husbandmen to aid it in its growth. Now He takes, as it were, this one circumstance, and makes it the subject of a special parable.

‘And He said, so is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up whilst he knoweth not. For the earth of itself bringeth forth fruit, first the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear. And when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.’ This parable has no special explanation given to it in the words of our Lord. For the images of the seed and of the harvest are already familiar to the hearers of the former parables, and there



are no persons brought in in this, as in the Parable of the Cockle, whose work or words might require explanation. The point of the parable therefore is in that circumstance on which our Lord may be supposed specially to insist, because it is a circumstance which has not been made prominent in the other parables of the same series. This circumstance is the gradual and spontaneous growth of the seed under the ground. This circumstance would not have applied, to recur to a former illustration, if our Lord had represented Himself, or His Father, as building a temple or a house, instead of sowing seed. For in that other image it would have been implied that the work was carried on from the beginning to the end by the same hand and the same industry. For, if a builder relaxes his labour, the building is at once stopped. And if He had spoken of the planting of trees, it could not be said that the growth of the tree would be imperceptible. But the Kingdom of God, that is, the progress of the work of grace in the soul, proceeds by the innate powers of the seed sown and of the soil in which it is sown. Each of these is endowed with elements of fertility which fit in the one to the other, the powers of the Divine Word, and the powers of intelligence and volition which belong to the soul. Then, by the cooperation of these two sets of elements, the process of fructification proceeds, even if there be no more work brought to bear on the part of the sower, after he has deposited the seed in the soil, that is, the Word of God in the soul. There is something which appears like an anticipation of this parable in the Book of the Prophet Isaias, where God says, ‘As the rain and the snow come down from Heaven, and return no more thither, but soak the earth and water it, and make it to spring, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be, which shall go forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me void,

but it shall do whatsoever I please, and shall prosper in the things for which I sent it.'<sup>1</sup>

Although our Lord speaks of the earth as bringing forth of itself, still the parable, taken as a whole, contains the double doctrine, of the vital power of the seed and of the fertilising power of the earth to which it is committed. He says that the seed springs and grows up whilst the sower knows not, as well as that the earth of itself brings forth fruit, first the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear. The earth requires the seed and the seed requires the earth, and, if nothing is said of the other genial influences, as of the rain, and the sunshine, and the air, and the like, it is probably because the influences which correspond in the spiritual order to these elements in the growth of the corn are taken for granted in all the works of God for the benefit of souls. For grace is never inoperative, never denied in cases in which no impediment is put in its way. This parable seems intended by our Lord to place before us two truths in a kind of contrast. The first of these is the truth that God requires the service and work of the sower of the seed up to a certain point. This work is indispensable, and without it there can be no growth and no fertility. It is as St. Paul says, 'How shall they believe Him of Whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach, unless they be sent?'<sup>2</sup> The condition of faith, which is exacted by God, renders the office of the preacher, or teacher, or witness, or messenger of God, essential. But our Lord goes on to tell us that this office is not essential after the seed has been deposited, the word delivered, the message made known. The husbandmen go away and turn their hands to other things, to the sowing perhaps of other fields, and they

<sup>1</sup> Isaias lv. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. x. 14, 15.



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are not wanted again until the harvest time, when the full corn has to be gathered in. This is one truth that is set forth in this parable. The other truth is the counterpart of this, and it is required by this in order to complete it and make it perfect. The truth is, that God has given a marvellous power of growth and fertility to the word which has been delivered by His ministers, and as it were sown in the souls of their hearers. Our Lord draws out this in the few words in which He seems to linger with so much delight over the gradual expansion and progress of the seed sown. He describes the earth as bringing forth of itself, and the seed growing up, and the like, and the appearance of the blade first, then of the ear, then of the full corn in the ear. He might, as has been said, have added in other details, for He might have spoken of the office of the sun, or of the rain, and the like, but all these natural forces are on the same side of the comparison or contrast, so to speak. They are not the work of the sower or the husbandman, although he reaps the fruit of them all, and although the work of each of them is, in its way and degree, necessary to the happy result to which he looks forward. All these things come under the head of the work of Nature, that is, in the truth which is represented in the parable, under the head of the work of God and His grace. It is what St. Paul speaks of when he says, perhaps with this parable in his mind, 'I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase.'<sup>3</sup>

The first point in this comparison is one on which long meditations might be made. Although God alone can read the human heart, and although He can at will act upon it by the illuminations and powerful movements of His grace, yet it has not pleased Him to deal immediately with soul after soul in the communication of that

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 6.

revelation of Himself which He has made to man, and in the administration of the ordinary means of His grace in the Church, which He has founded and placed in the world as the witness of His truth and the mistress and instructor of mankind. He can flood the soul with light and grace when it pleases Him, but He has ordained that men are to learn of Him from men, and that they are to receive the sacraments and the vital truths of faith from others like themselves. Thus the Word of God is like the seed which is sown by man, and which will never spring up unless it is so sown. But the seed is to be sown, as well as received, in faith. That is, the sower has to be content to labour without seeing the immediate fruit of his toil, he has, to use another similar image which we find in the Book of Ecclesiastes, to 'cast his bread upon the running waters, which he will find again after a long time.'<sup>4</sup> This doctrine holds good of all the various ways in which the Divine Word may be communicated, though perhaps it is intended more specially to apply to the method of preaching. For the preacher does not know the souls of those to whom he addresses himself, nor the dispositions in which they come to listen to the Word of God, and these are in truth very different in one person and in another at the same time and in the same place. Nor does he know on whom it is that his words have taken effect, nor which of his words have had the most effect. He knows often that what he sets most store by himself, has been the least fruitful part of his instruction. And he finds out that some almost chance expression or illustration has struck home, when the passages which seemed to himself the most important have not been so successful. And above all, which is the point most plainly set forth in this parable, he has to go his way to other work and

<sup>4</sup> Eccles. xi. 1.



other scenes of labour, and it is only after a long time that he may find out that his words have sunk into the hearts of men, and have there been fruitful.

This truth holds good in other instances. Such is that of the Christian writer who devotes himself to the illustration of Scripture or of the dogmas of the faith, or any other similar head of instruction. He cannot tell by whom his words are read, or what is their effect on any soul in particular. But, after a long time, it may be, that he is rewarded by seeing the truths which he has been setting forth taking possession of a number of minds, and he may meet with this or that person who tells him that he owes the conversion or the advancement of his soul to him. What he writes is adopted by others, and thus he may preach without being a preacher, and may reach the souls of large assemblies and multitudes, while he spends his own days in retirement and study. Much the same may be said of the effect of good example, of the consistent courageous practice of the Christian virtues in the daily walk of life in which men are called to serve God. Such persons may bear a perpetual silent witness to those around them, shining, as St. Peter says, like lights in the world, without thinking of anything beyond the discharge of their duties in their several vocations. Yet it may be reserved for them in the great day of account, to see, with happy thankfulness, that they have benefited hundreds of souls, while they thought themselves the most unobserved and the least conspicuous of men. And so, in whatever other way it may be our duty or our privilege to be witnesses to the truth, whether it be in the region of doctrine or in that of practice, it is always true that we do not see the effects of what we may have to do or to say at the time, we have to go on our way and leave the result to God. It is well therefore always to be earnest in prayer, that we may be guided, day by day, to

say and to do what is right and most likely to be profitable to others, and then, when all due pains have been taken, to exercise the utmost confidence and reliance on God for the issue of our poor efforts.

The truth which is contained in the other branch of the parable is not less important or consoling than that of which we have been speaking. Why is it that the earth brings forth fruit of itself, why is it that the seed springs up while the husbandman knows not and thinks not of it? It is on account of the innate powers of the seed itself, and on account of the nourishing and developing elements in the earth. But not on account of these only, but also on account of the harmony and fitness which makes them congenial one to the other, the intrinsic powers of the seed cooperating with, and being unlocked by, the forces and influences which are supplied by the earth, and also on account of those other conditions under which the happy fruitfulness is developed, the bright and warm sunshine, the gentle breezes, the rains which make the earth fruitful and furnish to the seed the moisture which it requires. Man does his part, and it is soon done. The part of nature comes next, and it is a work which never rests or pauses till the fruit is ready for the sickle. The whole of human life, in the richest regions of the world, is simply kept up by the fertility with which God has blessed the soil of the earth. Without speaking of the marvellous treasures of the mineral creation, which are the productions to man of the soil on which he lives, the simple productive power of the earth in the ordinary returns which it makes year after year to cultivation, yields riches to the human race of which the sum total might seem something fabulous. And the bountifulness of nature, as we call it, is still more enhanced when we consider the immense variety of fruits and vegetables with which the bosom of this



common mother teems, the very large multiplication of the seeds and roots which are committed to it, and the immense fruitfulness with which it enriches us even without cultivation, while it supports also the tribes of the animal world for our use and consumption as well as man himself.

Thus it is that the wealth of the human race which is drawn from the earth alone is ever on the increase, notwithstanding the enormous consumption by which the life of the race is sustained. But it is well to remember that no fruitfulness of the teeming earth, of which the poets have sung, is to be compared in beauty and magnificence to the fertility of which the soul of man is capable, under the influences of divine grace, and when the good seed has been duly deposited in it by the ministration of the Word of God. Thoughts, conclusions, speculations, affections, resolutions, contemplations, imaginations, are the fruits of which the fertile mind and heart of man is, as it were, the soil. And in their multitudinous variety and rich beauty these far surpass the productions of the earth on which we live, in the richest regions which man can inhabit. The mind is never at rest, the will and the heart are always choosing and loving or hating, and the result of the productiveness of each may be the whole world of the most glorious acts of the highest virtues, internal and external, the noblest aspirations which soar in a moment up to the very throne of God. Such, at least, they may be. But they may also fathom the depths of Hell and people the world with foulness and loathsomeness beyond all description. The grandest splendours of Heaven throughout all eternity may be the issue of the workings of a single soul, and the same may alas be said of the lowest degradations of Hell.

What is required for the production of this glorious

result is nothing but the presence of the good Word of God in the soul, and the result of which we are speaking is the issue of the combination of the two forces of the soul of the word. For the soul of man is made for the reception of the eternal truth, as the soil is created for the placing in it of the good seed, and the Word of God is fitted, because it is His Word, for the soul which He has made for it, as, in creating the physical universe, He has fitted the soil for the welcome seed which it has power of making so productive. These are the divinely conjoined elements in the production of the spiritual harvest, the richness of which as far transcends the richness of earthly fields as heaven itself is above earth—the soul, with all its faculties of intelligence and choice on the one hand, and the word by which God addresses Himself to the soul on the other. We have every reason for thinking that the full result of which the Divine culture is capable is seen but in a comparatively small number even of the saints of God, and it is certain that we have but the faintest appreciation, under our present circumstances and with our present power, of the true glories of the spiritual kingdom as far as they exist. But we know enough to be able to understand that no yield of earthly soil, however rich and prolific, can be compared with the treasures of spiritual beauty which reward in the Kingdom of Heaven the tender love and fatherly care for souls of the great Householder. But whatever these glories and riches may be, they are nothing but the legitimate issue of the fertilizing power of the Divine word in its abode in the soul, which yields itself to its influence, without let or hindrance.

What our Lord seems then to wish to tell us is that all this wealth of result is something which transcends the power of the husbandman who casts the seed into the ground. That is, the work of grace and spiritual growth



goes on under the good hand of God Himself, as the fructification of the seed in the ground goes on under the influences of natural causes ordained by God. It is not that man has nothing to do with the guidance and continual cultivation of the souls in which the holy seed has been deposited. He may have much to do, but it is a work, in the first place, altogether distinct in itself from that of the first implanting of the word, and it is a work, in the second place, the whole power of which is in the hands of God. He it is that giveth the increase, though it may have been Paul who planted and Apollo who watered. And here too also He may speak historically, and He may have had in His mind the thousand instances in which the soul which has caught the good seed into itself, is left altogether independent of further teaching, but is nevertheless enabled to develope the fruitfulness of the word by the silent action of grace. For there is no Word of God which has not in itself this fertilizing and multiplying power, no particle of Divine truth which has not an intrinsic affinity with all that is good in the soul into which it falls, which has not the intrinsic power, not to be checked except by some positive hindrance, of awakening the soul into productiveness and fertility. Nor is there any soul of man which has proceeded from the hand of the great Father and Creator of souls, which has not been gifted by Him with the forces and faculties which are necessary for the unfolding in itself of the whole beautiful series of the Christian virtues, when it has once been touched by the gentle and life-giving presence of 'the engrafted word,' to use the beautiful expression of St. James,<sup>5</sup> who may have had in his mind as he used it this very parable of his Lord and Master. The doctrine which is here implied is that the immense fruitfulness of the spiritual

<sup>5</sup> St. James i. 21.

life, as it is seen in the case of the saints of God, is not anything in itself extraordinary, in the sense that it requires special and unusual treatment on His part in favour of those whom He so much loves, but that it is the natural and legitimate result of the combination and conjunction of the powers of the Divine seed on the one hand, and of the powers of the soul on the other, under the influence of His grace. Grace is to them what the atmosphere and the sunshine and the genial rains are to the grain cast into the earth and to the earth itself.

Thus, when we read of the power of the Word of God in its greatest manifestations, as in the effect of the Divine word in the conversion of large bodies of men at the preaching of the great Apostolic saints of the Middle Ages, or again, when we read of the fruitfulness of some single truth in the heart of one of the servants of God, as in the cases of St. Antony of Egypt or of St. Francis of Assisi, or of the effect of the thought of eternity on St. Stanislaus or St. Teresa, and the like, it is not to be supposed that the effects produced could not be produced, without an extraordinary influence of grace, on thousands of other souls, if only there were in them no hindrances to the full reception and welcoming of the word. The reason of the difference between the fruitfulness of the saints, and the comparative sterility of the word in the case of others, lies rather in the manner in which the word is received in the several cases, than in any diversity in the word itself, or in the powers of the souls to which it is addressed.

A very important conclusion is involved in these truths. This is, the truth of the immense and unique importance of the preaching and the hearing of the Word of God. This is a truth very much indeed ignored by those who consider that, if they or others say their prayers and frequent the sacraments, they may dispense



themselves from attendance on sermons, and other occasions when the Word of God is offered to them in the church, or, again, by those who think that the Christian community can ever be in a flourishing state without the constant and vigorous preaching of the Word of God, even to well-instructed persons. Much more is this truth ignored by others, who would have the ministers of the Gospel desist from preaching the truth on account of the little apparent fruit which results from their labours. Our Lord here describes the process of the fertilization of the soul, and He certainly does not exaggerate the part of the preacher or teacher, for He says he may go his way when his part of the work is done, and leave it to God and His grace to bring about the rest. But He does certainly say that the sowing of the seed is the one essential condition of the fruitfulness of the soul, and He encourages us to hope that fruitfulness will follow, by and bye, even in cases in which there is no present hope of it. Experience teaches us that a word of Scripture, or the saying of some good man, or something heard by chance in a sermon, may lie dormant, so to say, in the mind for years and yet at last wake up, as it were, and bring about a conversion. There is nothing so congenial to the soul of man as the truth of God. On the other hand, if the Christian preacher or minister of the altar holds his tongue, out of shyness or human respect, his forbearance may be of little matter for the moment, because at that particular time the soul of the other may be unfitted to close with the truth which might have been presented to it for acceptance. But it does not follow that he has not done harm which may be immensely mischievous in the future, for the seed might have been taken in, notwithstanding the reluctance of the will at that moment, and the time

might have come hereafter when the soul would have been in better dispositions, and when the circumstances of the moment might have urged home the truth with irresistible power.

St. Paul illustrates this truth when he so strongly urges St. Timothy to ‘preach the Word, be instant, in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, entreat, with all patience, for there shall come a time when they will not endure sound doctrine.’<sup>7</sup> As if to say that sound doctrine must be preached when it can, even though it seem to be out of season, because sometimes there will be no opportunity of preaching it at all, and then men will be the better, and have a greater chance of salvation, by having had it preached to them before, even when they have not attended to it. Thus it is a matter of constant experience that men who have been well instructed in their youth, and have afterwards left off the practice of their religion and fallen even into enormous sins, are open to conversion on their death-bed, if God gives them the opportunity. Other sinners, less guilty on account of their want of knowledge, are less within the reach of the influences of grace, as they have to be instructed before they can be converted. And the sects who make it their miserable rule to do all they can to make men live and die without any relations with the Church and her ministrations, show their consciousness of this truth by the diabolical activity they evince, in surrounding the death-beds of their most hardened associates with every possible barrier against the access of the priest or of the sacraments. What they are afraid of is the innate power of the truths of religion, the seed which has been sown in their hearts while yet they were young, and which has never yet been allowed to put forth its life-giving powers.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 2, 3.



We find many things in the commentaries of the Fathers and writers of the Church which may well be referred to before we quit the subject of this beautiful parable. We have been speaking of the sower of the seed, as if by him were signified all those who have in any way the office of witnessing to the truth, whether as appointed ministers of the Church, or as having the duty of what has been called Apostolical conversation incumbent on them, or simply as all Christians are bound to advance the knowledge of the law of God in their intercourse with their neighbours, or in their own families. The chief sower, however, in many of the commentaries of the Fathers, is our Lord Himself, and there can be no reason against this interpretation, which does not exclude the truth, that what is said of our Lord, according to the doctrine of this comment, may also be said of those who serve Him in the work of which the parable speaks. In that case our Lord may be said to speak of His own departure to Heaven, leaving the word which He has sown in the world behind Him, to work its way with the hearts of men. But it would be a loss to us if we were to be deprived of the application of the doctrine of this parable to others besides our Lord. Then, again, it could not but be that the Fathers would fasten on the picture, so to call it, which is here drawn of the gradual growth of the seed committed to the ground, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. It was natural of them to see in this description the three grades or degrees in the spiritual life, that of the beginners, that of the proficient, and that of the perfect. The blade is the tenderest, the ear is stronger than the blade, and the corn in the ear is the perfection and complete growth of which the seed is capable. Others tell us that the blade signifies those who by faith and fear give up evil things, the ear those

who rise higher and higher by love of eternal things, and the corn in the ear represents those who are perfect and full-grown in charity. Or again, as S. Gregory says, good desires are the casting of the seed into the earth, the beginning of good works is the blade, proficiency in them is the ear, and perfection in them is the full corn. And once more, they see in this gradual growth, as described by our Lord, a warning against the imprudence which aims at doing everything at once, and at working the works of the higher stages of the spiritual life, before we have made ourselves familiar with those which belong to the lower.

There is yet another manner of understanding this parable and its application which has much to recommend it, on account of its position in the series of these first parables descriptive of the Kingdom of God. According to this method of interpretation, our Lord has before His mind, not so much the working of the Divine seed of the Word of God in soul after soul, individually, as the progress and accomplishment of the great work of the Church in the world as a power and a kingdom. This interpretation begins by supposing that our Lord Himself is the Sower in the first instance, and that He goes away, as is said in the parable, and leaves the seed to work of itself. Not that our Lord is ever absent from the Church, for He has promised to be with her even to the consummation of the world, but that His visible presence is withdrawn, and He leaves the work which He Himself began, to be carried on and perfected by others, under His own continual guidance and protection. And then, at the end of time, He is to come again. 'When the fruit is brought forth, immediately He putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.' These last words have not so plain a meaning in those interpretations of the parable in which the



sower is the minister of the word or the ordinary Christian, for with them, in many cases, the harvest never comes in this world, and it is the principle of the Kingdom, so to say, as our Lord has expressed it elsewhere, that one soweth and another reapeth. The word of truth or grace which is sown by one comes up at last to be gathered in as it were by another, when the first labourer is in his grave. It is not of course impossible to explain the reaping in that sense of which the former interpretations are the result. For the words may be understood of the evangelical preacher or labourer, who continues the work he has begun, by receiving the sinner to penance, or the converted unbeliever to baptism, or the heretic to the unity of the Church, or the dying man to the full privileges of the Christian death-bed. And our Lord's words may be an expression of the joy of heart of such as have this blessing, of seeing at last, after many labours and long delays, the fruit of all their toil.

But the words seem most naturally to refer to that accomplishment of the work of the Divine Word in the world at large, which will be the occasion for the Second Coming of the Son of God, when the number of the elect is accomplished and the truth has been witnessed to over the whole world, when every nation has had its trial, and the full course of the great counsel of God with the human race has worked itself out. Then at last will the harvest be, the last persecution will be over, the evil one finally conquered, the regeneration of all things at hand, the creation itself to share in the glorification of the Sons of God in soul and body, in the new heavens and the new earth in which justice dwells. And in this sense the parable before us forms the best possible introduction to the others which immediately follow it, in which the Kingdom of Heaven is described,

first as a grain of mustard seed cast into the ground, which grows up and becomes a great tree and spreads out its branches for the fowls of the air to take shelter in, and in which the progress of the Kingdom to so high a state of external magnificence and influence is described. And then the same progress is compared to the gradual leavening of a large mass of meal with a small quantity of leaven. In this way our Lord first of all, in the present parable, describes the patient growth of the Church until the harvest. Then He speaks of its visible magnificence and imposing presence in the world, under the image of the mustard seed, and lastly of the method of its assimilation to itself of the society into which it was sent forth, under the image of the leaven.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### *The Parable of the Mustard Seed.*

St. Matt. xiii. 31, 32 ; St. Mark iv. 30—32 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 60.

THE two parables which follow in order on that of the seed growing of itself, are so placed by the two first Evangelists, who alone relate them, as to make it appear that they were delivered, if not at the same time, at least to the same audience, as those which have been already examined by us. For the account of them is followed by the declaration of the Evangelists that our Lord spoke these things and other things to the people in parables as they were able to bear them, and that without parables He did not speak to them. There are yet, as we shall see, three others, which belong to this time, but as to which we are not told that they were



uttered to the people, and are rather led to think that they were addressed to the disciples only. Our present business is with the first of the two, as to which it is undoubted that they were addressed to the multitudes.

‘Another parable He proposed to them, and He said, to what shall we liken the Kingdom of Heaven? and to what parable shall we compare it? It is like to a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field, which when it is in the earth, is less than all the seeds that are in the earth, the least of all seeds, and when it is grown, it groweth up and becometh greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, and shooteth out great branches, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in the branches under the shadow thereof.’

The points of the comparison are easily seized. The seed sown is very small, chiefly in comparison with the bulk which it attains, for there may be other seeds actually not larger than that which is spoken of. It grows up to a size and height quite out of proportion, and becomes, although not a large tree among trees, still larger than others of the same class to which it belongs, so as to be a tree rather than a herb. It puts out branches, and in these branches and under its shade the birds of the air are content to dwell. Thus this parable may be said, as has been the case with others, to spring out of the preceding parable. There our Lord had dwelt on the marvellous power of fructification possessed by the seed of corn, when it was once deposited in the ground, a power which it displayed without the labour of the sower, owing it only to its own innate vigour and to the elements in the earth and other circumstances which make it fruitful. Now our Lord passes on to another comparison, and it is no longer the seed of corn that springs up as if the earth brought forth of

itself, first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear. Another image is required to set forth the magnitude which is attained by the growth of the spiritual seed, and this image is to be that of a seed which becomes at last nothing less than a tree, larger than the rest of its class, and capable of giving shelter to the fowls of the air. In the former parable the point was that the seed should grow at all by virtue of its own powers, and in this the point is the size and magnitude which it attains and the shelter which it affords.

The first question raised as to this parable is that which relates to the image here used by our Lord. It is not quite certain that the plant of which He speaks is that which we now call the mustard plant, and which in these countries we are not accustomed to see growing to any great size. It seems of little importance whether we can exactly identify the plant, and there is in the East a plant called Khardal, which is said to resemble mustard in everything, and to be considerably larger in growth. But the most simple explanation seems to be that the plant is what we call mustard, but that in the East, and in other warmer countries than our own, it reaches a much larger size than among ourselves. Maldonatus says that in Spain its branches are used for heating ovens, and that flocks of birds collect in its boughs without breaking them down. There are other similar statements which seem to take away all difficulty as to the interpretation of the image. Our Lord, as has been said, does not choose this particular plant to represent the Church or the Kingdom of Heaven because there are no trees of larger size, but because in this particular case the seed is very small, and the growth very large in comparison. There are plenty of instances in Sacred Scripture in which the image of a tree is applied to a Kingdom, as in the dream of



Nabuchodonosor, and in the description of the Assyrian Empire in the Book of Ezechiel.<sup>1</sup> But the trees there spoken of are larger and more magnificent, and it cannot be doubted that, with these images before Him, our Lord deliberately altered the particulars so as to make His tree a mustard tree.

It is also asked whether we may consider that the use made of the mustard tree in particular by our Lord is meant to set us considering what are the peculiar qualities of this plant, in contrast to others, and outside the special point of the smallness of the seed in comparison to the growth. Are we to endeavour to find in them some correspondence with the special characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven to which it is compared? There are several passages in various Fathers in which this idea is followed out, and it can hardly be fanciful to think that the principle on which these commentaries are founded is legitimate, if not certainly true. Thus the mustard seed is said, in a sermon attributed to St. Ambrose, to be small and of little value, to have no savour or odour which attracts and pleases, to require crushing or pounding before it gives out its taste, and then to show its pungent and biting qualities, to burn and sting like no other plant of the same order, as if a great power of fire had been enclosed in its small compass. In these qualities some of the Christian writers have seen the humility and insignificance, whether of the Gospel teaching itself, or of the means of grace, the powers of the Word, though set forth by humble instruments, and the burning and stinging effects of grace on the soul which receives it into itself, having been accustomed to the softness and unwholesome sweetness of the world, the languor and torpor of sensuality, the smooth deceits of the effeminate life, and the like.

<sup>1</sup> Ezechiel xxxi. 3—9.

There can be no difficulty in following out this line of interpretation, and there is no reason for thinking that our Lord may not have had the qualities of the mustard seed before His mind, when He spoke this parable. But the main point of the similitude seems to be that of the size and importance to which the mustard plant grows, having begun from so small a seed. Thus it would seem also that our Lord is directly pointing to the space which the Church would fill in the world, or, again, to the manner in which the influences of grace would fill the life of the soul and engross all its energies. The Church itself was, when He left it at His Ascension, but an almost imperceptible germ in the midst of the great human society. Its numbers were very small, its members were altogether without influence, station, repute, and power. An enemy of our Lord, such as Caiaphas or Annas, might have said to himself, within a few days of Pentecost, that the evil seed sown by the Nazarene Prophet had been indeed trampled under foot. Even the beginnings of the Church attracted little notice, at first, from those watchful foes who had brought about the death of our Lord, and it was thought by them sufficient, when their attention was at last aroused, to scourge the Apostles and forbid them to teach in the Name of the Lord. It was in their sight a thing insignificant in itself, and one of which there was no reason to fear the success. It did not appear to have any vitality, or any considerable inherent power of spreading itself and gaining a hold on the world. What was there in it to promise anything of the kind?

And so also there was nothing about the Church to attract the attention or raise the alarm of the politicians around the throne of the Cæsars at Rome. The Parthians or the Germans or the Dacians on the borders of the Empire, gave them ten times the amount of



anxiety. A revolt of the Gauls or a sedition in Alexandria was far more in their eyes than the preaching and miracles of the whole Apostolic band. The religion of the Christ was not worth meeting on its own ground, the ground of argument. It was quite sufficient to treat it as a detestable and unreasonable superstition, and drown it in the blood of its fanatical adherents, who were in their proper place as the prey of the wild beasts of the amphitheatre. Even while it was gradually filling the world and conquering silently all the better parts of the pagan society, it was still contemptible. It had no men of mind, no famous rhetoricians, no generals, no claimants to the purple. But at last it came to fill the sky and its greatness could not be questioned, and then the powers of the world and the rulers of the nations began to discover in the Church an influence which might afford a shelter and a sustaining protection for themselves. They began to see how the Church made men the best citizens in this life as well as the heirs of the life to come, how law had no foundation so secure as conscience, how the public service was never so safe as in the hands of those who sought a heavenly kingdom, how all that is good and noble and fruitful, in the natural order, was fostered and developed and magnified and endowed with a new life, by the breath of the Divine Spirit of the Kingdom of the Incarnation, how philosophy became fixed and rooted in immutable and unquestionable truth, how science received fresh wings to soar to Heaven, and fresh keenness of perception to unlock the treasures and the secrets of nature, how art became heavenly, instead of the reflection of the lower passions, how the world, the inheritance of man, was laid open to him at last to enter and take possession of it, and how the civilization and elevation of the whole race into one great and enlightened brotherhood became no longer an impossible dream.

All these truths are included under those simple words of our Lord, that 'the fowls of the air came to dwell in the branches thereof.' It may well be that the powers of the Church for the enlightenment and elevation of mankind in the natural order have never as yet been fully developed, and that the future history of the world may proceed on the same lines as that of the last centuries, in which the Church has been losing rather than gaining on the allegiance of the nations, which is the necessary condition of the accomplishment of this work. But our Lord speaks of results that have been fulfilled, though they might have been more gloriously fulfilled than they have been. He does not use the whole glowing language of the evangelical prophet, for in the prophecies of the latter there are more lofty things said concerning the dominion of the Church than are contained in the comparatively modest image of the mustard tree. Indeed, this contrast is remarkable between the language of the prophetic passages which our Lord must have had in His mind, as He uses in some particulars the very words of those prophets, and His own humble prediction, for prediction it is, concerning His Kingdom. He seems to tell us that the Church is to be conspicuous for its wonderful growth and also for its protective power. But He does not say that that growth shall fill the whole world, nor that the whole natural order of society shall take refuge under its shade. Ezechiel had said, in describing the ultimate glories of the Church, 'I myself will take of the marrow of the high cedar and will set it; I will crop off a tender twig from the top of the branches thereof, and I will plant it on a mountain high and eminent. On the high mountains of Israel will I plant it, and it shall shoot forth into branches and shall bear fruit and it shall become a great cedar, and all birds shall dwell under it, and every



fowl shall make its nest under the shadow of the branches thereof.'<sup>2</sup> There is His own humility in the way in which our Lord has adapted this image to the circumstances of the history of the Church. But, on the other hand, looking back to that history as it has unfolded itself, before angels and men, during nineteen centuries, we cannot fail to be struck with the exactness of the fulfilment of the prediction of our Lord, modified as it is from the more glowing language of His Prophet.

What is true of the history of the Church in the accomplishment of its work, is also by a kind of necessity true of the working of Divine grace in the single individual soul. It may not only most truly be said, that the unhindered working of grace in any single heart produces immense results, out of all proportion to its beginnings. This may be seen in considering the work of sanctification in a soul such as that of St. Paul or St. Mary Magdalene. It is also true that there is in such cases something which may be considered as answering to the result of which our Lord speaks, when He says that the fowls of the air take refuge in the branches of the mustard tree. In itself, the progress of a soul to perfection, as far as that progress can be traced as ordinarily following any general law, is a work and a growth of very great magnitude in the moral and spiritual order. The seed that is first sown is the love of God, or the desire of His grace and friendship in some way or degree, whether it takes the form of a flight from the miseries of the world and of a life of sin, or of that desire of higher things which our Lord wished to arouse in the heart of the rich young man, when He bade him, after keeping the commandments from his youth up, to go and sell what he had and give to the poor and come, follow Him. It is a great thing, that earnest and vigorous

<sup>2</sup> Ezechiel xvii. 22, 23.

turning away from past sins in confession and contrition, with which the process of the purgation of the soul is commenced. It is a great thing, that holy self-hatred in which those who are to be led on to perfection fly from the occasions of sin, as St. Peter did when he went out and wept bitterly, and which vents itself in the affliction of the body, as the instrument of sin, in the penances of the saints of which we read so much as the first step in their conversion. This work of satisfaction is a great triumph over nature, the severe poverty, the abandonment of earthly goods, the seeking for contempt, the vengeance on themselves to which they are so often guided. This self-affliction lasts often more or less in various degrees during their whole life, though bodily infirmities, or other causes of prudence, may interfere in regulating its measure. The saints have not only to get rid of their sins and of the penalties of their sins in confession. They have to root out the bad habits which have fastened themselves on the soul as weeds upon the soil of some neglected garden. The long list of the seven deadly sins and their children, as they are called by spiritual writers, remains for perfect extirpation and conquest, evil roots ever ready to spring up, the moment the watchfulness of self-discipline is relaxed. Then comes the equally long and arduous process of the subjugation of the affections and passions, the concupiscent and irascible principles in the soul, which are not to be exterminated like the seeds of vice, but to be reduced to proper order and rule, so as to be useful under the guidance of mortification, until the firm peace of the interior kingdom is established.

This peace requires the long, but the blessed and happy labour, of the planting in of the Christian virtues after the example of our Lord, humility, the contempt of the world, human honour and glory, the willing subjection



of themselves to others, obedience, ready to undertake any toils and exertions which may be enjoined upon it, the abnegation of self-will and judgment, the love of suffering, patience, readiness under contumely, joy in adversity and humiliation after the pattern of Christ in His Passion, the perfect practice of purity, the banishing of sensual images and thoughts from the soul, which is gradually taken possession of even as to its imaginations and fancies by the spirit of holy devotion, and the representations which belong to it. This region of the virtues is a glorious world, into which the love of God and of perfection leads the soul. And it soon becomes aware that there is nothing which can put it in possession of this new Kingdom but the life of prayer, as the same life is also the surest weapon for the conquest of the passions and the acquisition of interior peace.

A soul thus occupied by the spirit of prayer is raised, in one sense, to a heavenly life. But in another the world is laid open to it as a matter of study and anxiety, because it becomes sensible of the vast range covered by the interests of God and the work of our Lord in the world around it. Contemplation opens to such a soul the miseries of the world, the whole series of the Life and actions of our Lord, the beauties of the souls of His Blessed Mother and of the Saints, the benefits by which God has enriched His creatures, the Divine perfections, and the mysteries hidden in the Sacred Scriptures. Such a soul is moved to weep over the blindness of men, the miseries and calamities of which sin is the parent, its own daily defects and past offences. It is kindled with fresh desire for virtue, it learns the power of the intercession of our Blessed Lady and of the Saints of God, it rejoices in the union with God which it is already allowed to attain, it pours itself out

in prayer for the conversion of sinners and unbelievers, and the exaltation of the Name of God. It finds a holy joy in the perfection with which that Name is already honoured by the good, it melts in praise of His majesty and glory, it closes more and more entirely with His will in all things regarding itself and others, and becomes more and more altogether one with Him.

A soul that has learnt to live in prayer, after passing through the stages already enumerated, is indeed a plant, in the garden of the Lord, of marvellous growth and magnificence. It may require the eye of Heaven to discern all its beauties, and so far it may not perfectly answer to the image which is here used by our Lord, which seems to be in the main an image of external growth. But the development of the holy seed in it completely corresponds to the words of the parable. The mind is pure, if not from all slight defects, at least from wilful and serious irregularities. The casting away of temporal things is complete, for the heart is filled with the untold treasures of the spiritual world, and to such a heart there is no room for the love of the things of this world. The appetites are reduced to peace under the rule of charity. The tongue has been tamed to perfect circumspection. The thoughts are well-ordered, all pure and clean, not simply from the foul images and desires of the lowest appetites, but even from all that is idle and vain, frivolous and inordinate, unworthy of the eye of God. The desires are indeed impatient with a holy impatience, longing for the works and the services of the children of God with an eagerness which surpasses in intensity and force the ambition of the worldling, the craving for greed of the avaricious, the sensual yearnings of the voluptuary, and the baneful desires of revenge which torment the hearts in which hatreds and animosities reign. In such souls as these all the works are beautiful, not only in aim and



intention, in substance and in character, but in completeness and integrity, in the absence of all flaw and inattention and wavering or uncertainty of purpose, of all self-complacency or vanity to mar them after they are accomplished. In such souls, moreover, there is not only the robust activity which issues in the whole range of virtues, as opportunity for exertion is afforded. There is also the patient endurance of adversity and hardship, the joy in tribulation and trial, the constancy in the midst of the fires of temptation, which mark the consummate perfection of the imitators of our Lord. In them indeed the grain of mustard seed, to revert to the original image used in this parable, reveals its qualities when crushed and beaten down. Such men 'possess their souls in patience,' as our Lord elsewhere says, and their gentleness and sweetness are most fully manifested under the sharp trials of persecution, and the perpetual friction of the imperfections of those among whom they live.

It is needless to speak of the other internal perfections which grow out of the full work of grace in these perfect souls, the manner in which their charity binds all their faculties to a continual occupation on their one best object, that is on God, how their will is so united to His as to be moved by it as the limbs of the body are moved by the soul, how they are, in the sense in which the Apostle speaks, transformed into God, nailed together with Christ to the Cross, so that not they live, but Christ liveth in them. But these thoughts are enough to show how large and powerful and fruitful is the growth of grace in the faithful soul, which opposes no hindrance to the work of God within it. It indeed becomes a great tree, and fills the wide heaven of the soul in which God has chosen to dwell. And, if we are to seek, in this application also of the parable, for something which may answer to the latter part of our Lord's description, when He

says that the birds of the air come and make their nests in the branches of this blessed tree, we may find this in a twofold consideration. In the first place, the process of sanctification and of growth in perfection of which we have been speaking, affects indeed directly the spiritual faculties and the moral life of the soul, but it has also its most precious though indirect effects on the intellectual and mental faculties also. It perfects the will, it develops the mind, it regulates and trains the imagination to flights and achievements for which it would otherwise have no capacity. The whole man is ennobled and elevated, he is more truly a man, made after the image of God. Just as vice degrades and enfeebles and endarkens and lowers and makes childish, even the men who are most wonderfully gifted with intellectual endowments, so does union with God and the constant presence of His grace, acting on the soul, raise men above the tottering and stammering and dreamy and purposeless imbecility in which the life of worldliness and pleasure consists. That life has its cruel and malignant side, for it is essentially the worship of self. But, measured by an intellectual standard only, it is the life of the lower animals led by beings who are the heirs of His Heavenly Kingdom, and yet who never rise to the level of their gifts and destinies, any more than the children who die in the cradle, or the idiots who grin and chatter throughout a life, long in years, which yet can never be truly called a life.

And again, in another sense, there is a grand result of the growth of perfection in a single soul which benefits others, and which therefore may be considered as a fulfilment of this part of our Lord's parable. For no one is good and virtuous and holy and perfect in his union with God and in the ripe maturity of His spiritual gifts, who is not of immense service to all around him.



The interior peace and light and strength of these pure souls fall on those who come across them, in patience, and meekness, and charity, in wise and holy counsels, in bright examples, breathing courage and hope on all who see them, and in the power of a lifelong prayer. The saints are the true supports of the world, the guides of the ignorant, the beacons of the wanderer, the comfort of the lonely and broken hearted. Their wisdom leads the Church in her pilgrimage, their prayers are the strength and the light of the champions of the faith.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

#### *The Parable of the Leaven.*

St. Matt. xiii. 33 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 60.

THE two parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, which appear to have been the last of this series which were delivered to the people by our Lord, are supplementary the one to the other. It seems as if our Lord had intended to set forth two great truths concerning His Church, the Kingdom of the Incarnation, and the working of the Gospel grace in the world, and had chosen two separate images, one for each of these great truths. We have already spoken of the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Although that parable admits of more than one interpretation, it seems most directly intended to foreshadow the large space which the Church was to occupy in the world, the extent of her dominion, and the large range of her influence over things which do not exactly belong to or form part of her. An image of this kind might be applied to any large visible kingdom

or institution in the world. It might be applied to an empire such as that of Rome or England, it might be applied to the religion of Mahomet or of Buddha. But there was something peculiar to the Gospel kingdom which was not to be found in any other, and which could not be so well expressed in the image of the grain of mustard seed. This is the assimilating and transforming power of the Gospel truths, which work within the minds and hearts of those who receive them, to such an extent as to make this interior process the characteristic means by which the Church was to attain her great power and influence in the world. This was something altogether different from the growth of a small seed into a large tree. Many important truths concerning the Gospel were folded up in this figure, and our Lord therefore subjoins it immediately to the other, contained in the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

‘Another parable He spoke to them. The Kingdom of Heaven is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.’ The image here set forth is one of the change of a large mass, without any external alteration in its shape or form, and without the application to it of any power from without. The meal remains meal, but it has been penetrated by a new influence, which has affected every particle of it. Nothing has been destroyed, nothing has been removed, no new element has been introduced which constitutes a fresh and independent substance or portion. The leaven is in the whole mass, and in every atom of it. It has been absorbed, or it has changed the quality of every part to which it has penetrated, and it has penetrated the whole. It has lost, so to say, its independent existence, and in exchange for that it has qualified all around it.

It is natural that the Christian commentators should



have found particular applications for every single word of this short parable. A man takes the mustard seed, and plants it in his garden. A woman takes the leaven, and hides it in three measures of meal. Each sex therefore has its share in the work of God in the Gospel kingdom. The woman is either our Blessed Lady or the Church, or the preaching of the Word. Our Lord, or the knowledge of our Lord, is the leaven. Our Lord is full of the fervour of charity, He is burning with the desire of drawing all to Himself, especially those who labour and are heavily burthened, He has filled the whole earth with His knowledge, He has raised our nature to Heaven, He has drawn the hearts of men from earthly things to things celestial, from perishable goods to eternal, and so He has made us pleasant and tasteful to God, whereas we had before been like the accursed dust which the serpent was condemned to eat. We are capable of pleasing God by our faith, of gaining His commendation by our works, and by the same earning from Him eternal rewards. Our Blessed Lady was the first to receive this Divine leaven, and in this she was prefigured by Sara, to whom Abraham said, when he received the visit of the Angels, ‘Make haste, temper together three measures of flour, and make cakes upon the hearth.’<sup>1</sup> First in her heart, and then in her pure womb, she received this leaven. The Divine Word, the Soul of Jesus, and His Body were there commingled or united. St. Bernard may give us a specimen of this method of application. ‘Here you have,’ he says, ‘three kinds of power. That which was not, is created, that is, the soul. That which had perished, was repaired, that is, the flesh. That which is above all, is made a little lower than the Angels. These are the three measures of meal in the Gospel which are leavened that they may

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xviii. 6.

become the bread of Angels, of which man may eat, the bread that strengtheneth man's heart. Happy that woman, blessed among women, in whose chaste womb this bread is prepared, the fire of the Holy Ghost coming upon her. Happy, I say, that woman, who into these three measures of meal hath put the leaven of her faith, since by faith she conceived, by faith she brought forth.'<sup>2</sup> Then again, we are told of the spread of this leaven. Our Blessed Lady was first of all leavened, and then she sped at once into the mountain parts of Judæa, that St. John Baptist and his parents, Zachary and Elisabeth, might be leavened also. The voice of her salutation filled them with the Holy Ghost, and made them prophets. Then St. John began to collect disciples, and by preaching and baptism to prepare them for Christ. Then our Lord drew to Himself the Apostles, by means of whom He leavened the whole world.

Other Fathers draw out this point, of the communication of the leavening power to those who are already themselves leavened. St. Ambrose tells us that whoever has joined himself to the leaven of Christ, becomes leaven himself, not only useful to himself, but profitable to all. He is secure of his own salvation, and also that he will gain others. But this must be at a certain cost. The leaven that is to be spread throughout the mass of meal must be as it were broken, crushed, scattered, and must lose its own cohesion, in order that it may bind into one mass the whole quantity of meal, make it into one body, having been before only a heap of particles, without body or solidity. So also our Lord, Who is the leaven of the world, is broken, torn, and crushed to pieces by various sufferings. His Blood is shed that it may be the cause of the binding together of the whole race of men into one, whereas before that there was no cohesion between

<sup>2</sup> St. Bern. *Serm. de tribus mixturis.*



them. Something of the same kind must happen to all who are to be, in their turn, leaven to others. Thus the Apostles, who became the leaven of the world after the Day of Pentecost, were a few unknown, persecuted, afflicted men, who yet had the power, by the sacrifice of themselves, to raise men from earthly to heavenly things, and make them acceptable to God.

To others the woman is the Divine Wisdom by which the whole dispensation of the Gospel Kingdom is arranged. The three measures of meal are the three continents known to antiquity, or the three races of men descended from the sons of Noe, or the three Laws, the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Evangelical, in all of which it was possible to gain and use profitably the grace of God. The chief point of the parable seems to lie, not in the circumstances of the application of the leaven, but in the manner itself in which the leaven works, and in the effects which it produces. This image first of all teaches us that the action of grace, whether in the individual soul or in society, is nothing violent, nothing destructive, nothing subversive. Grace finds, so to say, a congenial soil in the soul of man, and it does not eject or cut down any part of our nature. In the action of the Church on society the same truth is remarkably evident. The Church takes human nature and human society as she finds them. In their origin both are divine works, and there is no essential element in them that is bad. The Church takes the family, the community, the State, and qualifies them by her own divine power for the ends for which they were originally established. So it was historically. She worked from within, using personal influence and example and communication as her great human instruments, rather than preaching to large masses, which was impossible, or the power of literature, in which she had few very great

champions in the earlier centuries. The same process is always going on in the gaining of souls to God, whether it be to a higher life, a more perfect observance of the precepts, the embracing of the Evangelical counsels, or, again, the conversion of heretics and schismatics and unbelievers.

The natural principle, therefore, on which all action of this kind rests, is the similarity or congeniality between the influence or the person which acts as leaven, and the substance or the person on which it so acts. No amount of such influence can make a substance into another substance altogether different, as a stone into bread, or wood into flesh. The leaven fastens on that which is kindred to itself and so open to its influence. Thus the Church has never conquered a nation or a community, as it were, from without. She has gathered up all the fragments of truth that were scattered over the world, disengaged them from the coating or setting of error in which they were imbedded, brought them together, arranged them in harmony, and so she has given life to each particle and to the whole system in which they have naturally coalesced under her benign influence. In the application of this principle of her action, which is so beautifully illustrated by some of her early writers, who had to deal with the heathen systems of religion, philosophy, and social life, lies the secret of the success of the Apostolical work, especially that part of it which is devoted to the reduction of heretics and the conversion of nations who have never before heard of the Church. In all false systems—and every soul of man with whom the Apostolical worker has to deal has a system, so to call it, of his own—in all such systems there is a grain of truth, probably many large fragments. There is a point in the intellectual road up to which the false system simply follows the true,



and after which it diverges from it. The process of persuasion must begin from this point, and when men's faces are once set in the right direction instead of the wrong, the path of error is left farther and farther aside as the onward march proceeds. The whole of the doctrine taught by the most prudent and experienced saints for the reclaiming of sinners by persuasion, is summed up for us by our Lord Himself in a few words in this Parable of the Leaven. There we have the most perfect picture, in all the series of these parables, of the power of personal contact and intercourse, and of the manner in which our opportunities of these are to be made profitable, by fastening on what is already good and true in the souls of those who are in error, or in rebellion against the law of God.

It is curious, as has been noticed by some writers, that the image of leaven is often used in Scripture for something bad, rather than for something good. These writers, some of whom have been enemies of the Church, have seen in this parable a kind of prophecy of the many evils which, as they suppose, have been introduced into her system, ending, in the opinion of these heretics, in the entire corruption of her body. If it were necessary to refute such strange doctrines, an answer to them would be found in the words of our Lord, Who is speaking here also of the Kingdom of God. But the truth is that the image of the leaven is in itself one capable of a twofold interpretation, for it may express the manner in which either truth or evil, either what is good or what is bad, may be propagated and spread. Besides this, the image had a peculiar significance to the holy people, on account of the injunction to put away all leaven at the time of the great feast of the Pasch, in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt, an injunction which was always observed, and which was

connected with a special ceremony in every household at the time when the Paschal Supper was celebrated. With regard to the image itself, it is quite clear that evil as well as good may be communicated in this way, although there is a sense in which it may be said that evil and falsehood are never congenial to the human soul and mind, in the same way that goodness and truth are congenial thereto. All evil and all falsehood are perversions, distortions, corruptions, and such things have not the natural force of consistent and systematic growth. But, as a matter of experience, the evil which follows from contact with evil is as rapid and extensive in its propagation, as the good which is communicated by the intercourse with the good.

We have the authority of our Lord and St. Paul for this use of the image, and we may consider their use of it in an evil sense as conveying to ourselves a salutary warning. There are three leavens mentioned by our Lord, against which, at various times, He warned, not the people only, but also the Apostles. Not long after the delivery of these parables, He warned the disciples to take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the account of the same incident in St. Mark, it is said that He mentioned the leaven of Herod. At a later period of His preaching, St. Luke tells us, that when great multitudes stood about Him, so that they stood one upon another, He began to say to His disciples, beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.<sup>3</sup> Here we have three kinds of evil, one of which is interpreted to us by our Lord as hypocrisy. That was the leaven of the Pharisees, a leaven to which the teachers of any religion are liable, especially when the people flock to their ministrations. This leaven begins to work, as soon as ever our practice

<sup>3</sup> St. Matt. xvi. 6 ; St. Mark viii. 15 ; St. Luke xii. 1. |



becomes inconsistent with our profession, as soon as ever our acts of religion become devoid of the spirit which ought to animate them. This is, in truth, a leaven, a mischief which gradually spreads over the whole life, destroying prayer, piety, devotion, energy in good, hopefulness, trust in, and familiarity with, God, and opening the door to every vice, according to the temptations to which any soul may be exposed. There may have been a possibility of this leaven beginning to work, even among the Apostles, at the time when our Lord warned them. And if it was so with them, how can any one, however deeply engaged in the service of God, hope to be free from it?

The other leavens our Lord does not name, but by characterizing them as the leavens of Herod and of the Sadducees, He seems to point to the danger of worldliness in the one case, and of self-indulgence and sensuality in the other. The leaven begins by small encroachments in every case, and it had probably already begun to work in the soul of Judas, one of the Apostolic band, who was nevertheless infected with that amount of worldiness which is involved in fondness for money. This vice may be concealed under the most holy appearances, and it may begin by the simple but excessive eagerness for money for good works, or the maintenance of those who are working for God. Worldliness is always accompanied by selfishness, and thus the latter, in the most subtle forms, is a sure sign of the presence of the former in the soul. Thus we often see persons who are engaged in good works, active and unscrupulous in outrunning and outwitting others who are similarly occupied. There is not merely an honourable emulation in the service of God. There is a positive ambition to be first and to stand forward as the most successful in the public eye. Then, to secure

this kind of success, that men may obtain for themselves the best opportunities of distinction, and the like, there is often a pettiness and a meanness in scheming for such objects of which even worldlings would be ashamed, and which they are very quick in detecting when those who profess not to be worldlings are so foolish as to use them. Indeed, worldliness in the sanctuary is one of the greatest evils that can infect the Church, a mischief which may often work more fatally than some grosser sins. This may be considered as the leaven of Herod.

It remains to say a few words on what our Lord may have meant by the leaven of the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the materialists of their day, the men who cut down the range of certain truths to the lowest possible standards. Their doctrines led them, as it seems, directly to a disregard of the sanctions of the moral law, by destroying the entire belief in the future existence of the soul, or indeed, in its existence independently of the body. But it must not be supposed that the Sadducees made any open profession of these consequences of their own principles. For such a profession would have ruined their credit in the eyes of the people. But it is most likely that their lives were in accordance with their opinions, and if these did not lead them to an open disregard of the moral law and of conscience, at all events they must have opposed a very feeble barrier against practical self-indulgence, and the indolent pursuit of comfort and ease of every kind that was not reprobated by public opinion. It is not easy to see how any Christians can hold the opinions of the Sadducees. But it is a matter of daily experience that many lives may be practically guided by principles no higher than theirs, as soon as the habit and spirit of prayer have died away. If our Lord thought it well to warn the Apostles against this leaven also, it cannot



be supposed that it is a light danger, or a danger which can only assail men of very little faith. When St. Paul used this image to the Corinthians, he was remonstrating with them most severely upon their toleration of open, excessive, and enormous license in the matter of impurity. ‘Know you not,’ he said, ‘that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened.’<sup>4</sup> This is enough to show that there may be a great danger of the spread of this last-named leaven, even among Christians. And this danger may be particularly rife in ages of luxury, refinement, material progress, when ancient severity is laid aside, even by those who very frequently approach the sacraments, and the prevalence of a certain kind of culture serves as a disguise for a large amount of softness and effeminacy. Constant efforts are now made, in the most Christian countries in the world, to bring back the state of social corruption in the midst of which the Corinthians lived, and from which they had just been dragged by their great Apostle. These efforts are most forcibly aided by the prevalence of sceptical and material views in philosophy and religion. To say this is almost the same thing as to say that we live in a society in which the leaven of the Sadducees is actively at work.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. v. 6, 7.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *The Parables of Asaph.*

St. Matt. xiii. 35 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 60.

THIS parable of the Leaven seems to have been the last which our Lord, on this occasion, delivered to the people. St. Matthew, whose Gospel, as has already been said, is the fullest of all in relating this kind of teaching, adds, at this point, a statement about our Lord's method, which he, the Evangelist, as is so usual with him, illustrates from the Old Testament. 'All these things Jesus spake to the multitudes in parables, and without parables He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.' Thus St. Matthew finds, in the adoption of this form of teaching by our Lord in His dealings with the multitude, another trait of that resemblance to the picture of the promised Messiah which had been drawn by the prophets of the Old Testament. He sees here also a fulfilment of prophecy. It is therefore interesting to examine the particular passage to which he refers, for the purpose of comparing the anticipation with the fulfilment.

At first sight the fulfilment adduced by the Evangelist seems to rest mainly on the use of the word parable in the passage which he quotes. The passage is not from the prophetic books in the strictest sense, but from the Psalms, so many of which are full of predictions con-



cerning our Lord. The words do not occur, however, in any of the Psalms which are commonly considered as prophetic. They occur at the opening of the long and very beautiful Psalm of Asaph, the seventy-seventh in the whole collection. This psalm forms part of the series of what are called the Asaphic psalms, which make up the greater part of the third book into which the whole collection is divided. They may not all be the production of Asaph himself, who was a contemporary of David, for he left a school or choir behind him, and the spirit of the psalms which he himself wrote may have been taken up by members of this choir at later periods of the history, when events occurred of import similar to that of those events which he commemorated. The distinguishing character of these psalms of Asaph is that they dwell on the Providence of God over His people, whether in chastisement or in protection. They are not personal psalms, like so many of those of David. The earliest of these psalms, in the order in which we now possess them, is that which is the forty-ninth in the Vulgate. It is a psalm describing the judgments of God in general, though probably not without reference to the circumstances of the day in which it was written. This is in the second book of psalms. The third book opens with a mournful psalm, the seventy-second of our collection, in which the author describes himself as sorely tempted against faith in Providence, on account of the prosperity of the wicked. It may perhaps have been written by Asaph during and after the short-lived triumph of Absalom. The next in the series describes the destruction of the Temple by the Chaldeans, and must therefore have been simply prophetic, if it was written by Asaph himself, but not so if it is the composition of a later author. Then follows a short psalm of triumph for the overthrow of the proud enemies of God, and

this may have been occasioned by the famous overthrow of the Assyrians in the time of Ezechias. This seems certainly to be the subject of the next in order, the seventy-fifth of the Vulgate. The next of these psalms is directly historical, the writer finding comfort, under the afflictions of the people in his own days, by the record of the great doings of God for them in the deliverance from the Egyptians. ‘Thy way is in the sea and thy paths in many waters, and thy footsteps shall not be known. Thou hast conducted Thy people like sheep, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.’

Thus we are led on to the great psalm from which St. Matthew quotes the words on which we are engaged, which carries on the history to its second great point, the elevation of David and of the tribe of Judah in his person. Thus the psalm embraces the whole second period of the history of the people as a nation, the period of the predominance of the tribe of Ephraim, when the Tabernacle was at Silo, the predominance which was afterwards to some extent restored by the revolt of the ten tribes under Jeroboam from the house of David. But there is a special strain of reproach in this psalm, which recounts not only the manner in which God had had mercy on His people time after time, but also how He had been again and again rewarded by their apostasy or rebellion. This strain may have been in the mind of the Evangelist when he spoke of the chastisement of the people of Galilee, by the comparative withdrawal of the full light of the Gospel teaching, at the point of time when the parabolic form of teaching was exclusively followed by our Lord in His addresses to them.

With this thought in our minds, we shall find it very interesting to follow the various ‘movements,’ so to speak, of which the psalm, like some wonderful piece



of sacred music, is made up. The purport of the whole psalm, as has been said, is to reproach the people with their continual ingratitude to the favours of God, and to show also how God has, over and over again, borne with them with exceeding patience, and overcome, so to say, their evil by His own ineffable and inexhaustible mercy. The psalm begins by declaring how God had decreed that His dealings with His people should be remembered and handed on from generation to generation, 'that they may put their hope in God and may not forget the works of God, and may seek His commandments. That they may not become like their fathers, a perverse and exasperating generation, a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God. They kept not the covenant of God, and in His Law they would not walk, and they forgot His benefits, and His wonders that He had shown them.'

Asaph then relates the marvels of their deliverance from Egypt, the Exodus, their guidance by God in the desert, the water given them out of the rock, and the rest. Then again comes in the refrain, 'They added yet more sin against Him, they provoked the Most High to wrath in the place without waters.' He speaks of their murmuring against God for their want of food. God was angry with them, but still He provided for them. 'He had commanded the clouds from above, and had opened the doors of heaven, and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them the bread of heaven. Man eat the bread of angels, He sent them provisions in abundance.' He mentions also the quails which were sent for their food, and their subsequent rebellion. 'As yet the meat was in their mouths, and the wrath of God came upon them. In all these things they sinned still, and believed not for His

wondrous works, and their days were consumed in vanity, and their years in haste.' But their chastisements brought them to repentance. 'When He slew them, then they sought Him, and they returned, and came to Him early in the morning, and they remembered that God was their helper, and the Most High God their Redeemer.' But still it was a hollow, or at least not a lasting repentance. 'They loved Him with their mouths, and with their tongues they lied unto Him, but their heart was not right with Him, nor were they counted faithful in His covenant.'

Nevertheless, Asaph continues, God was again merciful. 'He is merciful, and will forgive their sins, and will not destroy them. . . He remembered that they are flesh, a wind that goeth and returneth not. How often did they provoke Him in the desert, and move Him to wrath in the place without water?' Then the Psalmist goes back again to the wonders of the deliverance from Egypt, and of the chastisements of God on the enemies of His people. He goes on to the mercies shown in their introduction into the promised land. 'He brought them into the mountain of His sanctuary, the mountain which His right hand had purchased. And He cast out the Gentiles before them, and by lot divided to them their land by a line of distribution, and He made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tabernacles.' But still they behaved with Him as before. 'Yet they tempted and provoked the Most High God, and they kept not His testimonies. . .' The long series of their infidelities, up to the time of their enslavement to the Philistines, from which they were delivered by Samuel, Saul, and David, is passed over in a few mournful verses. 'He put away the tabernacle of Silo, the tabernacle where He dwelt among men, and He delivered their strength into captivity, and their beauty into the hands



of the enemy. . .’ But after this there was again a return of His mercy. ‘The Lord was awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that hath been surfeited with wine.’ The psalm ends with recording the choice now made by God of Juda instead of Ephraim, Jerusalem instead of Silo, ‘the tabernacle of Joseph,’ and of David instead of Saul.

Thus we find that the passage quoted by St. Matthew as containing a prophecy of the adoption of the parabolic method by our Lord in His teaching, refers us to the whole subject of the dealings of God with His people, and more especially to that part of those dealings which consisted in His chastisement of them for their perversity, and the continual returns of His mercy. It is enough, perhaps, for the explanation of St. Matthew’s use of the words which he quotes, that they speak of parables and deep sayings, things ‘hidden from the foundation of the world.’ For St. Matthew is so keen in his perception of the anticipations of the New Testament which are to be found in the Old, that the mere words of Asaph in the psalm before us would be enough to arrest his attention. Still, it is not straining the meaning of Scripture too far to see in the words of the Evangelist something deeper than this. It is the method of St. Matthew, as we have seen more than once, to point to whole contexts of Scripture by the citation of a few words from those contexts. If we ask ourselves what are the parables which Asaph pours forth in the great psalm of which we are speaking, we can find no better answer than this—that they are contained in the dealings of God with His people, which have a significance beyond that of simple historical narrative, inasmuch as they are in themselves the representations and exemplifications of great principles which regulate the whole course of His action towards those whom He

chooses to favour. He was acting on these principles in the very matter before us, of the withdrawing from the people of the full light of our Lord's teaching, and the parables now delivered were in themselves the exposition of many of these principles.

We have the authority of St. Paul for this interpretation of the Scripture history, and St. Paul may be taken as representing the best school of prophetic interpretation among the doctors of Jerusalem in the time of our Lord. St. Paul uses the history of the chosen people, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, in this way, for the purpose of warning the new Christians against provoking God as the Israelites of old had provoked Him. 'I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all in Moses were baptized in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, and they drank of the spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ.' Here is a spiritual interpretation of those marvels of which so much is said in the beautiful Psalm of Asaph. The Apostle continues, 'But with the most of them God was not well pleased, for they were overthrown in the desert.' This is the other strain, so to speak, of the same Psalm. 'Now these things were done in a figure of us, that we should not covet evil things, as they also coveted. Neither become ye idolaters, as some of them . . . neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them tempted, and perished by the serpents. Neither do you murmur, as some of them murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them in a figure, and they are written for our correction, upon



whom the ends of the world are come.'<sup>1</sup> There is considerable correspondence between the actual events selected by Asaph and those selected by St. Paul. But the most important point is the principle of interpretation adopted by the Apostle, which is like that which he uses in his Epistle to the Galatians in the famous comparison of Sara and Agar to the two covenants.<sup>2</sup> But if we may suppose that the Psalmist meant to point to this representative and typical character of the events on which he was to dwell, by the words which he uses at the opening of his poem—for a most beautiful poem it is—we are able to see in St. Matthew's application of his words, a fresh and a deeper meaning.

The great subject of the psalm, as has been said, is the manner in which God deals with His people, correcting them, chastising them, and then again forgiving them and defending them. The psalm ends with the introduction of David, to whom the guidance of the people is committed. 'He chose His servant David, and took him from the flocks of sheep. He brought him from following the ewes great with young, to feed Jacob His servant, and Israel His inheritance. And he fed them in the innocence of his heart, and conducted them by the skilfulness of his hands.' David, especially in his kingly character, and, it may be added, especially in the character of a good shepherd of the people of God, is a type of our Lord and of those who represent Him, in successive generations, as the pastors of the universal Church. This would be enough to attract the attentive devotion of a mind like St. Matthew's. But it may be said without straining, that the subject-matter of this series of parables, taken as a whole, is much the same as that which, if we follow the line of interpretation suggested by St. Paul, is suggested by the series of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 1—11.<sup>2</sup> Gal. iv.

historical events in the Psalm of Asaph. The only difference between the two is the difference naturally caused by the different spirit of the two covenants. The scattering broadcast the seed of the Word, the patience with which so many failures are tolerated, caused by the perverseness of those to whom the Word is addressed, the permission of evil even in the kingdom of the Church, the chastisements which in the New Covenant are so constantly deferred till the end of the world instead of being at once inflicted, the marvellous constancy of God in bringing about His work as instanced in the two last parables, represent to us what we may call an Evangelical version of those very rules of conduct on the part of God which are instanced, in a more severe exemplification, in the narrative of Asaph. The chastisement which is inflicted on the people of Galilee is not anything that can be compared in external severity to the miseries which were allowed to fall on the Israelites of old, and yet, in truth, it is something more terrible, because it is a spiritual chastisement. It is the captivity of sin and darkness, the withdrawal of light, the handing them over to enemies more savage and relentless than Egyptians or Philistines.



## CHAPTER XV.

### *The Parables of the Treasure and the Pearl.*

St. Matt. xiii. 44—46; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 62.

Two things might have been expected, in the case of the parabolic teaching of our Lord. The first of these would be that, after having proposed His parables to the people, in the presence of His disciples, He should explain to the latter, as far as He deemed it necessary, that meaning of the instructions which was more or less veiled from His ordinary hearers. He did not do this in all cases, as far as we can gather from the Evangelists. It was more in accordance with His usual method with souls, that He should furnish the Apostles with just sufficient guidance as to the meaning of particular parables, and as to the general principles in accordance with which they were to be interpreted. He always left a great deal to the process of consideration, reflection, meditation, the comparison of one truth and one statement with other truths and other statements. This process was always going on in the minds of His attentive and faithful followers, who were thus led on by the silent teaching of His Father. They were students in His school, not simply hearers and learners, and He preferred, as He always prefers, this method for the mastering of the truths which it is His desire to see deeply rooted in souls. This was the process by which our Blessed Lady was ever more and more illuminated, although to her the mysteries and the truths of her

kingdom must have been made manifest with the utmost freedom and largeness of revelation. There is much that is analogous to this in the gradual unfolding of the treasures of doctrine which our Lord committed, once for all, to His Church. He has preferred that their fuller exposition, according to the needs of successive generations, should be the work of the Christian Doctorate under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, rather than that every single detail and item should have been written down from the beginning. The office of the Holy Ghost, the everliving authority of the Church, the ministrations of the different orders of her heaven-gifted children and servants, are thus provided for in His Kingdom. We have already noted that our Lord did not give even those explanations of the parables which we possess, without expressing some surprise, almost some disappointment, that the Apostles had not, of themselves, penetrated His meaning. We may suppose that these blessed companions of His gathered so much light from the explanations of the Parables of the Sower and of the Cockle, as to be easily able to understand the remaining parables without special explanation.

Another thing which we might expect to find in the Gospel accounts of this great series of instructions, would be that there were certain points of doctrine thus conveyed, which might be addressed to the Apostles alone, and not also to the people. In any system of Divine truth such as that conveyed in the parables of the first series, it is natural to expect that there should be some truths altogether reserved for a time, as well as some truths set forth to the multitude in a manner which would render them intelligible only to the studious and diligent hearers. It is not, therefore, surprising, if we find that the three last parables of the series before us, of which it now remains to speak, seem not to have



been delivered to the people at all, but only to the Apostles. 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field, which a man having found, hid it, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a merchant, seeking good pearls. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it.' 'Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a net cast into the sea, and gathering together of all kind of fishes, which, when it was filled, they drew out, and sitting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels, but the bad they cast out. So shall it be at the end of the world. The Angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' We may reserve this last of the three parables for another chapter, and devote the present chapter to the consideration of the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl. These two parables have so much in common, that it may be well to take them together. There is a difference, indeed a kind of contrast, between them on one or two points, but the similarity is greater than the difference, and the subject-matter of each is the same.

Before, however, we examine the parables in themselves, it may be well to point out the manner in which they are contrasted to the series which had preceded them. In the former parables, then, the work of God in the Church, in the preaching of the Word, in the spreading of the truth throughout the world, in the conversion and sanctification of the individual soul, had been spoken of as an enterprise or undertaking proceeding according to the usual laws of nature. As to the recipients of the word or the seed, the process seems almost impersonal. We know that in the case of those

who are like the seed by the wayside, or like the seed cast on stony ground, or in the midst of thorns, or again, of those who are as the cockle, the result of fruitfulness or sterility does actually depend very mainly on the will and choice of each single soul. Those who are as the seed on the good soil, those who are the growth of the good seed in the midst of which the cockle is oversown, are what they are by their own faithful cooperation with the grace of God and the opportunities afforded to them by His Providence. Yet the descriptions in the parables almost ignore this truth. Our Lord is more intent on tracing the action of His Father and Himself. In the same way, He speaks of the seed springing up of itself while men sleep, He speaks of the grain of mustard seed sown in the field, and of the leaven put into the measures of meal by the woman. Not much has hitherto been said of the human side in the good growth, of the readiness or eagerness to hear, of the desires of grace, the thirst for peace with God, the burning fire of longing for the Kingdom of Heaven. Nothing has even been said of that hunger and thirst for our salvation and beatification which was the moving power of His own Life, nothing of the love of God for souls which made Him give His only-begotten Son that whosoever believe in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life. We are told indeed of the prospect of the harvest in the case of the householder in the Parable of the Cockle, and of the time when the sickle is put forth in the Parable of the Seed. But this other side of the picture is now made the prominent feature, and this constitutes the main point of contrast between these and the former parables.

The Kingdom of Heaven, in these two parables, is represented as the motive of great sacrifices, whether on the part of the man who has found the treasure, or of



him who has found the one valuable pearl. It may indeed, be doubted, whether in the language in which our Lord spoke, the words would not go beyond the more limited meaning of the Greek, in which, if it be strictly taken, the Kingdom of Heaven is first likened to the treasure, and not to the finder of the treasure, and then not to the pearl, but to the merchant. It seems more easy and more accurate to understand the words as a simple declaration, that in the Kingdom of Heaven certain things take place, which resemble, in the first place, the action of the finder of the treasure, and in the second place, the action of the finder of the pearl. So it seems to be in other comparisons of our Lord, as when He said to Nicodemus, 'The Spirit breatheth where He will, and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh, or whither He goeth, so is every one who is born of the Spirit.'<sup>1</sup> He did not mean that every one born of the Spirit had these qualities, but that that was what took place whenever any one was born of the Spirit. And, in the next parable, when He says 'the Kingdom of God is like to a net cast into the sea,' He means, in like manner, that there shall be in the Kingdom something which is faithfully represented by the incidents which follow when the net is drawn to shore. If this is so, it is not so much here that the Kingdom is the treasure or the pearl or the finder or the merchant, but that it is a Kingdom in which the greatest and most absolute sacrifices are joyfully made for the sake of that good which is found without being sought, or found after being sought. This is the chief new point, then, in the instruction, that the Kingdom of Heaven is a Kingdom of immense sacrifices for the acquisition of immense treasures. There is that in this Kingdom which answers to the treasure and the pearl

<sup>1</sup> St. John iii. 8.

in value, but more than that, there is that in this Kingdom which is fitly represented by that appreciation of the treasure and of the pearl which leads to the parting with everything for the sake of their possession.

If this be taken as the principal point of these two parables, it is easy to see that a very wide range of application is laid open to us. In many respects the principal agent in the earlier parables is God Himself, or our Lord, and it seems natural, in the first instance, to carry on the same line of interpretation, and to consider that here also there is conveyed to us a representation of that infinite and ineffable love of God for the human soul, which brought about the whole condescension of the Incarnation, and all its consequences, in time and in eternity. For God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son for it, as we are told in the discourse of our Lord with Nicodemus. And our Lord so loved the human soul as to give for its purchase the whole that He had, for He sacrificed His own most beautiful life, His Sacred Humanity, which was destroyed on the Cross, for the purchase of that which He so highly appreciated. It is not difficult to carry out this interpretation into detail. The treasure hid in the field may be considered as the soul of man encased in the corruptible body, or as the Church of the elect hidden in the mass of the human race, and the like. This treasure is hidden by Him Who finds it, for God leaves things as they are to outward appearance. His Kingdom, in many respects, is an internal Kingdom, and the whole action of His mercy, by which the redemption of the world was brought about, was quiet and unostentatious, such as to escape the eyes of the world itself, and to deceive, by its humility and lowliness, and weakness, the inveterate and most watchful malice of the enemies of God and man. And again,



our Lord hid the Church in the world of human society, He left it as a very small germ indeed, which the powerful and learned of the world could hardly think worthy of notice, and yet He made Himself, notwithstanding, master of all by means of it.

These are some of the applications of this line of interpretation, which are common to both of these parables, and we need not strain ourselves to find in them something answering to the distinction between the two images. In the first it is represented to us as if the finder of the treasure came on it unawares, without being on the search for it, while in the second parable he is represented as seeking for pearls and at last finding one of conspicuous value. In the first parable the merchant buys not only the treasure, but the whole field containing the treasure, in the second he buys only the pearl which he desires to become possessed of. Are there any truths in the purchase of our poor race by God and our Lord, which correspond to these details in the images which He uses? We may suppose that, in the first place, the treasure is not desired so much for itself, for gold and silver are not in themselves capable of giving us half the satisfaction and enjoyment which they are capable in other ways of purchasing for us. Their great value lies in this, that they are the commodities by means of which we are put in possession of anything, whatever it may be that we desire. We cannot clothe ourselves with them, or feed upon them, nor will they heal our diseases, or alleviate pain, or be to us luxuries and comforts or enjoyments in themselves. They do all these things for us, on account of their value as the current medium of society, and if that were not so, they would be utterly useless to us, at least far less useful to us than iron or stone or wood. Now there is something answering to this in the value of human

nature, in the eyes of God. It was not in itself anything very great and supremely valuable in His creation, certainly it was not so noble in itself as the Angelic nature. But it was, in the first place, the one creature which He had made that belonged to both the two different kingdoms into which creation had been divided by Him, the visible and the invisible, the spiritual and the material. Thus, if He conceived the design of infinite condescension, of taking to Himself the creation which He had made by means of His own union with it, the human nature alone of all presented itself to Him as the central point, so to say, in which both creations met, and which therefore might enable Him to unite Himself to the whole, by uniting Himself to it.

Again, this may be said to be something like a discovery or finding on the part of God. For the act and decree of Creation is something distinct from the further decree and act of the union of Himself with Creation, something not involved in the former act, something which arose out of the contemplation of the capacities of human nature, in the way of which we have been speaking. Thus, in the Scriptural account of the Creation, as we have it in the opening chapters of Genesis, it is represented to us as if the formation of Eve out of the side of Adam was a second thought, as if it had been occasioned by the fact that Adam had no companion, and that it was not well for him to be alone. In this way the act of God in choosing human nature for the point at which He would ally Himself with the whole of His Creation, may be represented to us in the parable of which we are speaking by the detail of the man finding a treasure in a field, and then for the sake of the treasure purchasing the whole field in which it was contained. And if we go on further in the history of this immense condescension of God, we find other



details which answer to something in the parable. For our Lord has purchased to Himself again the whole creation, by virtue of His Incarnation. For even the material universe is to share in the regeneration, which is to be the fruit of the manifestation of the sons of God. Again, He has purchased to Himself the whole human race, although the Church of His elect will not comprise the whole race of Adam. All things that He does are for the sake of the elect, but these are the few, rather than the many among the children of men. Thus, in the first parable He is not represented as seeking all that He buys, as is the case in the second. For He seeks primarily, and in the first instance, only those who are to be His throughout eternity, although in another sense it is most true that He seeks all. For He has paid the price for all, He has opened the blessings of salvation to all, and He most sincerely desires that all should be partakers of those blessings.

But, in the second of these parables, the details are varied, and yet it is as easy to see great truths concerning our Lord's love for the human soul in this, as in the former parable. In the first place, here it is a merchant seeking precious pearls, and not one who comes, as it were, unexpectedly, on a treasure of which he at once appreciates the value, and sacrifices everything to become its owner. That indeed is done, in this image also, but here our Lord seeks in the first instance what He finds. That which He seeks, then, is that which He purchases, neither more nor less, and what is it that He becomes the possessor of, except the soul of man, cleansed from all imperfection, and made glorious and radiant by His grace, in His eternal Kingdom? What is it but that Church, of which St. Paul speaks, when he says, that 'Christ loved it, and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of

water, in the word of life, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish?''<sup>1</sup> For as the Apostle says, the Lord knoweth those who are His, and in the contemplations of the Sacred Heart, as well as in the Divine foreknowledge, these are the jewels which give to Him perfect delight, as far as He can receive such from anything outside Himself. And our Lord had all the souls of His elect, as well as each single soul, most clearly in His mind and Heart in the moment of His great sacrifice, when He gave all that He had to purchase each, not all in a mass, but one by one. And if He delighted to sacrifice Himself for all the race, even for the souls of those who He foreknew would not correspond to His grace, it was a special joy to Him to think of the souls that were to be His treasures throughout all eternity, by means of their own cooperation to the work which He was doing for them. And the soul of one single saint is a far more precious possession to Him, than many souls of others who do not love Him so much.

The most usual interpretation of these parables, however, is certainly that in which the treasure or the pearl that is found, represents something spiritual which men like ourselves find or seek, and then acquire at the price of all that they have. The spiritual good may be variously considered, whether as the faith, or the grace of God, or the knowledge of our Lord, or the salvation of the soul, or the religious vocation, or the practice of prayer and familiarity with God, or perfection, or any other great treasure of the same kind. In truth, it is not so much one particular spiritual blessing which our Lord seems to wish to set before us, as the object of the utmost desire, and so of the greatest sacrifice. It is

<sup>1</sup> Ephes. v. 25—27.



rather that He seems to tell us that, for whatever it may be that is the one thing necessary for us, whether in the way of salvation or in the way of perfection, we must be ready to give all we have, and make whatever sacrifice may be required, if we are to be fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. But He represents it as found by some without seeking, and as sought by others before it is found. For there is, in the Providence of God, each of these ways by which spiritual goods are to be acquired. To some they are not present as objects of desire before they are found, and yet they are at once secured by some great sacrifice. And on the other hand, there are many who have to seek long, and with great perseverance, before they have the blessing of finding them.

Thus the faith of Christ was, as it were, suddenly found by St. Paul, and by others, such as the blessed martyr, St. Justin, it was sought for before it was found. In the history of conversions to the faith, and in that of vocations to religious life, or to the practices of perfection, there is constantly this variety in the dealings of God with the souls whom He wishes to make His own. Some find the truth like a treasure that suddenly appears before their feet, while they are thinking of something else, and others have to spend long laborious years in trying, first this and then that, and finding no satisfaction, until at last they come on that which is meant for them in the counsels of God. There are all these differences in the manner in which different souls come to the knowledge of that which it is the will of God for them to do, whether, for example, in embracing the faith, which they had not before, or in serving Him in the religious vocation, instead of in the world, or in the single state rather than in married life, or in the dedication of themselves entirely to the practice of prayer or of some particular kind of good work, as missionary labour, or labour in

the instruction of the young or the ignorant, or such a calling as that of St. Benedict Joseph Labre, or any other. These differences are represented in the parables by the different antecedents, of the finder of the treasure, and of the finder of the pearl.

But again, on the other hand, there is no difference at all in the condition which is set forth in the parable before us, namely, that the good, when found, must be purchased at the cost of all. To some this law involves the acquirement of something more than the thing itself, which is contained in it, as when a man has to join the visible body of the Catholic Church as the means of gaining the faith and the grace of God, or to enter religion for the sake of living in continence, or to acquire a great amount of human learning, in order to teach the ignorant, or to guide souls to perfection. In such cases the parable of the treasure hidden in the field has its application, while in others it is the precious pearl alone which has to be acquired at the cost of all, as when men already in the true fold are called to perfection, or souls already pledged to our Lord in religious life are called to the life of prayer. In these cases, and in others like them, the price must be paid. And surely we may understand our Lord here also as prophesying what shall be in the Church. We may suppose Him to mean that His Kingdom is to be one in which these great sacrifices are to be common and continual. And thus, putting together these two lines of interpretation, that which refers the search and the sacrifice to God, and that which refers them to men, we have a complete picture of one great characteristic of the Kingdom. It is one in which God gives immensely, and, to speak in human language, makes great sacrifices, for the sake of gaining the human soul, or the Catholic Church, or the race of man, one in which, on the other hand, the blessed infection of sacri-



fice spreads, far and wide, among those who are the objects of this love of God. They too are able by His grace to give their all willingly and heroically for the sake of His boons, or promise to accomplish His will in themselves, to gain some great spiritual good. Thus the Apostles, when our Lord asked whether they could drink His chalice, said boldly, We can. And there is no hint in either of these parables that the sacrifices thus made are ever repented of, or that perseverance and constancy are ever lacking in those who have once begun the life of entire service to God which has been shown to be so precious.

Indeed, the parables themselves help us, in some measure, even here. For if we ask ourselves, in conclusion, how we are to secure this blessed gift of perseverance, how to prevent ourselves from ever retracting our sacrifices, and thus casting away our pearl or losing our treasure, the answer seems to be conveyed in a consideration arising from the parables themselves. The man who finds the treasure, and the merchant who seeks the pearl, begin by having a right estimate of the value of that for which they give so much. It is the appreciation of the value of their purchase that makes their conduct reasonable, and the same appreciation which prevents them from ever regretting what they have done in making the purchase. In the case of any of the spiritual treasures which have been purchased by the sacrifices which we have to make, it can only be by the dying out in our minds of the sense of the value of these blessings, of the value of salvation, or of perfection, or of the life of prayer, and so of other things, that we can lose our fervour and become so unreasonable as to cast our purchase away. It is a well-known characteristic of spiritual goods, that they do not pall on the appetite of those who have them. That is what always happens in the good

things of this world. They are objects of great desire while they are not yet attained, but when they have been attained they are found to weary the heart instead of satisfying it. They are not the goods for which we are made, nor are they made to give satisfaction to the needs and desires of our nature. But spiritual goods are so made, and we are made for them, and so it is that the more they are known, the more they are desired, and the more they are possessed, the more hungry we become after them. And thus, even the silence of these parables as to any wearying of the purchaser of the treasure or the pearl, may not be without a Divine meaning. For it may be intended to show us, that, fickle and inconstant as we are, and surrounded by temptations, we shall still never regret the ventures we have had to make in giving ourselves most entirely to God. For the goods which are won by those ventures will be in themselves the constant cause of ever greater delight and satisfaction to those who have so purchased them. And, finally, the simple consideration of this truth suggests to us the means which we are to use to keep alive in ourselves the fervour which first led us to any sacrifices we have made. The continual contemplation and recollection of the preciousness of our treasure or our pearl should be enough for this purpose.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### *The Parable of the Seine.*

St. Matt. xiv. 47—50 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 62.

THE parables of which we have hitherto spoken formed, no doubt, in the intention of our Lord, a great chain or series of truths, full of importance both to the preachers and teachers of the Gospel, and also to those to whom their ministrations are addressed. If we cannot hope to penetrate to the depths of the Divine meanings which are contained in this succession of teachings, we may at least feel that, by means of the interpretations of some of the parables by our Lord Himself, and further, by the light thrown on the rest by those interpretations, and by the commentaries of the Christian writers, we have been able to gain a considerable insight into the lessons which we are intended to learn from them. The series begins with the account of the various fortunes of the Divine seed of the Word in various hearts, and the difference is, in the first place, attributed to the dispositions and characters and circumstances of various classes of hearers. These are explained carefully by our Lord, and the explanations convey to us warnings, of the greatest importance, against those several things which are named by Him as hindrances, either to the successful sowing of the seed, or at least to its perfect growth. But that first parable left out of consideration, except in one instance, the action of the evil one on the field which is cultivated by the ministers of the Word, and it gave no account,

moreover, of any growth in the field except that of the good seed, whether partially or fully fruitful.

In the second parable, this other element is added by our Lord, and we are told of the activity of the devil, not only in hindering the reception of the Word of God, but also in oversowing his own evil seed in the same field, an evil seed which grows up, and manifests itself by the side of the good growth. This parable contains another most important lesson, for it tells us that it is the rule of God's action not to proceed at once to the extirpation of all that is evil, whether in doctrine or in morals, in the field of the world and of the Church, and it bids us consider the extreme gentleness and forbearance with which He waits for the evil seed to become, perhaps, the good, and so spares it from destruction for the sake of the good seed by its side. The third of these parables illustrates the Divine power of the seed once sown, a power of fructification and prolific growth, to know of which is the greatest possible consolation to the evangelical labourer, who does not at once see the fruit of his many toils. It is 'Paul that planteth,' as the Apostle says, 'and Apollo that watereth, but it is God that giveth the increase.' But there are two elements in the growth of the Divine seed which require separate explanation, and these are the subjects of the next two parables. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed our Lord describes the magnificent outward development of the seed, whether in the individual soul, or in the world at large, in the growth of virtues and good works which present a great show, even to the outward eye, and in the formation of a mighty and conspicuous power, which serves even as a refuge and protection for the rulers of the world and of society, which also is the work of God. In the Parable of the Leaven, our Lord describes the interior working of the seed, or of the Christian element,



in the world or in the soul, its process of assimilation, the manner in which it does not set up, as it were, a new kingdom for itself altogether, without relations with and influences on what already exists, but rather contenting itself with affecting by its own influences the mass into which it is put by the wisdom of God.

The Parables of the Treasure and of the Pearl, as has been said, carry on the description of the kingdom a step further, for they set before us the truth of the immense goods, and the immense sacrifice made for the sake of those goods, which are to be found in the Kingdom of Heaven. The whole story of Christian heroism is contained in these parables, and it might seem that, having taken us thus far, our Lord might hold His hand, and leave us in the contemplation of the lofty vocations of which the Kingdom of which He speaks furnishes so many examples, and the great prices at which those vocations have been bought. And we closed the last chapter by the remark, that our Lord has not added anything to hint that it might be possible for men to weary of the prizes which they may have once acquired, by means of faithfulness to the guidance of God in the following of some high vocation, because, as it appeared, the spiritual treasures of the Kingdom are too precious, and too continually growing upon the taste of those who possess them, for there to be any danger of failing courage, and of generous perseverance in their pursuit.

But, if this were the doctrine of these two last parables, it might be one which is contradicted by the experience of the Christian centuries. It would come to this, that a sacrifice once made might be enough for a life, and that human frailty was not frail enough to cause ruin in many souls which have once taken up the best part. Our Lord is always warning us that it is not so.

He said more than once, when He had been speaking of the highest vocations in His Church, that many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first. It seems as if this was in His mind in the last of this series of parables, which now remains to be explained. That is, it seems as if He had intended to end the series by setting forth this truth, that among all orders of men in the Church, and therefore, even among those who have outwardly been the most heroic in their sacrifices for Him, there would be found some who would not in the end be worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the burthen of the parable of the Seine cast into the sea, of which we have now to speak.

‘Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a net cast into the sea, and gathering together of all kind of fishes. Which, when it was filled, they drew out, and sitting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels, but the bad they cast forth. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ At first sight, this parable seems almost a repetition of that of the Cockle sown in the midst of the wheat, and it requires some explanation to distinguish the peculiar point of each from that of the other. It is obvious, however, that in the former parable one great point, at least, is the principle of toleration, so to call it, on which the master of the field acts, in permitting the cockle to grow in the midst of the wheat. This is done deliberately, it is perhaps a departure from the natural line of action, and is the more noticeable on that account. For it is very conceivable that a good husbandman might weed his field of useless plants even before the harvest. But in the case of the net or seine let down into the sea, which is then dragged along the



bottom, so as to enclose all the fish that are in that part of the waters, the presence of bad fishes is what is to be expected, as well as that of good fishes. Again, in the Parable of the Cockle, the evil seed is deliberately introduced into the field by the action of an enemy, whereas there is nothing of this kind in the facts of the parable before us. The separation made by the reapers, that is, by the angels, in the former parable, is a measure taken to repair, in a certain sense, the toleration before extended to the evil seed. The object is to set right the mischief which may have been done by that toleration. In the case of the net, the division is rendered necessary by the conditions under which the original process of fishing is carried on, which fills the net with fishes both bad and good. The division is the principal feature in the second parable; it is the necessary complement of the principal feature in the first.

In the Parable of the Cockle there are but two kinds of grain gathered in at the harvest. The good grain is that which is left after the cockle has been removed. But in this Parable of the Seine we have the net collecting, as it is drawn on towards the shore, fishes of every kind. It is no longer one kind that is good and another kind that is bad. All are equally within the compass of the net, all are drawn together to the shore. We have thus a different picture from the former in this parable. We have the picture of a great variety of kinds of fishes, and there are presumably good and bad of every kind. Some kinds are better than others, but even of the best kind there will be worthless fishes. The ultimate division is not made by any external mark of difference, as that between the cockle and the wheat, but by the qualities of each individual fish of whatever kind it may be. It is an important doctrine, as has been remarked by some of the Catholic commentators on the

passage, that there is no nature bad in itself, no class, no vocation, no race, no lineage, no blood, no condition of life and work, which is either a passport to salvation or an exclusion from the pale of salvation. The Church includes all kinds, all races, all conditions of men, and the final division is to be ruled by the goodness or badness of the individual, and not of the race, or the nation, or the vocation, or the position in the Church itself, which may belong to this or that person. Here then is a principle which adds a new truth to those which have been already set forth in the parables, and which comes, moreover, most opportunely after the teaching of the last pair of parables, those of the Treasure and of the Pearl.

These two last parables, as has been said, have carried us on to the doctrine of the great sacrifices and high vocations which are characteristic of the Kingdom of Heaven. And as was also said, they leave out of sight the possibility of the purchasers of the treasure or the pearl failing in perseverance and becoming wearied of the blessings which have been purchased by them. At a later period of His teaching we shall find our Lord delivering the great parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, immediately after He had assured the Apostles of the very great reward which they are to have, who have left all things and followed Him. After making them the magnificent promise which He then made, and extending it to all who should leave the things most dear to them for His sake, He added that there were to be first who should be last, and last who should be first. And then He delivered that famous parable, as if for the especial purpose of warning them, that even the highest vocations might be forfeited, and that the gifts of grace were not always to correspond, in their distribution, to the order or comparative excellence of the vocations in the Church.



In the parable before us this doctrine, which is also the doctrine of the Parable of the Virgins, delivered still later on, is conveyed in the image of the fishes drawn to the shore by the net. There are to be in the Church people of every kind. There are to be ecclesiastics and religious, there are to be hermits and holy virgins, there are to be those vowed to the life of contemplation, or the life of active charity, those who have the awful powers of consecration of the Blessed Sacrament, and of applying the merits of the Precious Blood for the cleansing of souls from sin. Some are to preach the Divine Word, some are to be the pastors of souls, some are to be the rulers of the Christian people. And by their side in the great net there are to be those who have been ruled and guided by them, the married and the dwellers in the world, the soldiers and the statesmen and the artisans and the poor labourers, those whom the proud Pharisees of our Lord's own day would have looked down on as the publicans and sinners. But the selection and division to be made at the end of all things, will be governed by no other principle than that of the goodness or the badness of the individual soul, whatever may have been its position in the external kingdom of God on earth. Neither religion, nor the ecclesiastical calling, nor the glory of the pastoral office, nor the honourable state of continence, nor the priesthood, nor learning employed in the service of the Church, nor zeal in works of charity, nor the labours of the missionary, nor anything else of that order, is of itself sufficient to ensure the salvation of the soul. All these things are not incompatible with great unfaithfulness, and in all these positions death may find the soul unprepared, and with the stain on it of secret and unrepented sin. This is one side of the peculiar lesson of this parable.

We learn also, on the other hand, that when death strikes men down in the pursuit of some earthly and worldly calling, on the battlefield, or on the sea, or in the mart, or in the law-courts, when it gleans its victims from cottages or palaces, or falls on them suddenly in the street, in the midst of the strain of political conflicts, or far away from the means of grace and the ordinary consolations of the dying soul, it does not follow that those thus called to their account are among those who are to be rejected from the treasures of God. He alone knows the heart of man and the state of the soul, and it will be by that knowledge that the judgment will be administered and the lot of each child of Adam decided for all eternity. This then seems to be the special meaning of this parable, with which the series is closed, to signify that although in the Church there are so many various vocations and conditions of life, so many differences between the outward circumstances and opportunities of men with regard to the means of grace themselves, yet still the selection of souls for the heavenly kingdom will not be made according to these, but that the only certain passport to these eternal joys will be faithfulness and purity of conscience, and that by the application of this rule it will be possible for the lowest to be raised on high, and for the highest to be rejected altogether.

One other feature of the parable has been fastened on by the Catholic commentators, of which it may be well to say a word. In this parable it is said that the good fishes are gathered into vessels, while the evil are thrown promiscuously away. In the Parable of the Cockle, on the other hand, it is said that the cockle is gathered into bundles to be burnt, and the wheat is gathered into the barns of the great Householder. In the case of the cockle it has been thought that the gathering into bundles signified the truth that the sinners of each par-



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ticular kind of sin would be punished hereafter together, the avaricious with those like them, the proud with the proud, the lascivious with the lascivious, and the rest. So, in the present parable, it is thought that the gathering of the good fishes into vessels may signify the special character of the rewards of Heaven, which are to be apportioned, like the chastisements of the place of torment, in strict correspondence to the deserts in each case. The circumstance in question in each of these parables is perfectly natural, as a line in the general picture, and thus it might have been added by a human author merely for the purpose of embellishment, for it is as natural to bind the cockle in bundles as it is to gather the good fishes into baskets or other vessels. But we have good reason for thinking, from the manner in which our Lord has explained those parables of which we have direct and detailed explanations from Him, that no circumstance is added in these Divine pictures, without some specially intended meaning, and on this account it is safer to think that in the cases before us the explanation of the details in question may not be too far-fetched.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *The Scribes of the Kingdom of Heaven.*

St. Matt. xv. 51, 52 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 62.

ST. MATTHEW subjoins to his account of these last parables, which, as he tells us, were delivered by our Lord to the disciples, after He had sent away the multitudes, a few words which are remarkable and important, as seeming to convey to us something not said before concerning the whole series of instructions which were thus closed. ‘Have you understood all these things? They say to Him, Yea. He said to them, Therefore every Scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a man who is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old.’

It can hardly be doubted that by the scribes instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, our Lord meant the Apostles, and those who were in any degree or manner to share and inherit their office of teaching in the Gospel Kingdom. He seems also to signify that He considered the instructions of which He had now come to the close as containing in themselves some sufficient amount of knowledge to justify the statement, that those who had heard and understood them were thereby qualified for the office of teacher in the Kingdom. If they understood the things which He had been setting before them, they might be called Scribes instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven. If this be so, then there must be in the parables now delivered a series of



teaching for the benefit of teachers, as distinguished from those who are to be taught by them. And He adds, concerning this teaching, as it appears, that its sufficiency lay in this, that it would enable them to discharge competently their office of teachers, not simply by the repetition of what they had now been taught, but by the application of the instruction conveyed to them in a way of their own, a way which He compares to the action of a householder who supplies the wants of his household, as they arise, from the stores which he has provided, now one thing, now another. The language reminds us of other words of our Lord recorded by St. Luke,<sup>1</sup> 'Who, thinkest thou, is the faithful and wise steward, whom his lord setteth over his family, to give them their measure of wheat in due season?' And the words now before us seem to convey the thought that the office of the scribe or teacher of the new Kingdom is one which has much responsibility, because much is left to it, and it requires much prudence and discretion in its exercise.

Our Lord uses the words 'new things and old' as it seems, almost proverbially, as if to signify whatever may be required at the moment, whether new things or old, just that which it is opportune and according to the needs of the moment to put forth. For it is certain that harm may be done, both by setting forth what is true at an inopportune moment, or by not saying what is required, as well as by saying less or more than is required. Our Lord has Himself warned us against giving that which is holy to dogs, and casting pearls before swine, in which case harm is done instead of good. And the prudent teacher will know just how to balance the new and the old, how to combine them, and how to withhold what may be dangerous, as well as how to set forth what is salutary. He will draw the new out

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke xii. 42.

of the old, he will put the new in such a light as to show that it is old as well as new, he will set forth the old in such a manner as to show that it is not obsolete, but in perfect keeping with the requirements and characteristic modes of thought which belong to the present time. As to this there can be no difficulty. All those who are the subjects of Apostolical instruction come to it with certain truths already fixed in their minds, although the truths they hold may be but partially understood, and not yet seen in their true connection, or even, more or less, overlaid by concomitant error. It is the office of the true Scribe, to use the name given by our Lord to the preachers and teachers of His Word, to seize on the truths which his hearers already hold, and from that to lead them to the new truths which are connected therewith. Thus He sets the old in new light, and He adds to it the new. Again, the state of mind in which people come to listen to the Word of God, whether it be preached or set forth in the humbler mode of teaching and instruction, is very various, and it must be for the Scribe to discern whether he should first of all proceed to the simple intellectual task of developing the old truth into the new, by showing the connection between them, or whether there may not be in the hearers some prejudice or some moral obstacle to the reception of the truth, which should first be removed before they can hear the Word with any fair hope of profit. In both these points, and in others, there may be great room for the discretion of the teacher, and as to this also there can be no question. What seems to be fair matter for inquiry is, whether our Lord means us to understand that the parables, as explained by Him, and as understood by the Apostles, contains anything which directly bears on this subject of the enlightened discretion of the Scribe, whether they con-



tain such a body of general rules and principles concerning the delivery of the Word of God, as may serve for the necessary armament of the Christian teacher on this most vital point? If so, this is something very much beyond the simple meaning of the parables as we have considered them.

In answer to this question, it may first be said, that the parables on which we have now been so long dwelling do not contain any body of Christian doctrine or of practice, which can be considered as a summary of that which is to be the subject-matter of Christian teaching. The ordinary Christian teaching ranges over the commandments of God or the Church, over the Articles of the Creed, over the duties of various states of life, the theological and moral virtues, the use of prayer and of the sacraments, and the like. If we turn to the parables before us, we do not find much directly on any of these points. They are descriptions, in general, of the conditions under which the Word of God is preached, the manner in which it is received, the innate power of the Word, the way in which God will deal, whether in this or in the next world, with those in whom the Word has been fruitful or unfruitful. These are all general matters, and their teaching holds equally true whatever be the particular head of Christian doctrine on which the teacher has been engaged. For instance, let the truth which is represented in the Parable of the Sower, or of the Seed that grows by itself, or of the Treasure and the Pearl, be either the importance of the soul, or the certainty of death, or the necessity of penance after sin, or the judgment, or the duty of obeying the Church, or anything else taken from the large range of Christian instruction. It may be any one of these, and yet the lesson of the parables in question will be exactly the same in any particular case. It will still be

true, that is, that the truth will be received differently by different hearers, that it will produce wonderful results, all things else being favourable, in the souls in which it is planted or sown, that it is worth any sacrifice that may be made for it by any one who understands its value. Each Christian truth has in reality a double source of power, in that it is a truth, which therefore has a necessary affinity to the soul of men in which it is sown, and in the second place, in that it is not only a truth, but that it is the Word of God administered by His own chosen ordinance of Christian preaching or teaching. And thus, what is true of one particle of that which may be made, under different circumstances, the Word of God, by any particular preacher in the discharge of his office, is true of any other. And all these parables differ from such a series of instructions as those contained in the Sermon on the Mount, or in the Evangelical Counsels, or in other parables, such as that of the Unmerciful Servant, that they are not instructions on this or that particular point of duty or of truth, but general principles and teachings which apply to the whole body of Christian truths and each part of that body.

In the second place, these parables apply in this general manner to the whole system of truths which may be made the subject matter of Christian instruction, not simply as a system of truths, but as a system any part of which may be addressed by the teacher to the hearers whom he may have to instruct. The parables relate to the Word of God as preached or taught to men by men who have the commission to teach. The parables are thus mainly addressed to the teachers, rather than to their hearers. It is the knowledge which they convey to the teachers, as to the conditions under which men receive or do not receive the Word of God, and the rules of His Providence concerning truths so



addressed, that makes our Lord's words so true and opportune, when He speaks of the Scribes well instructed to the Kingdom of God, who bring forth out of their treasure things new and old. The first thing that would be done by a husbandman who acted on the truths used as images, for instance, in the first parable, would be to endeavour to clear his field of thorns, to remove the stones where they could be removed, to frighten away the birds of the air, and, as far as possible, take care that none of his seed fell on the roadway or anywhere but on the good ground. Just so a preacher, with the lesson of that parable in his mind, would endeavour to dispose the souls of his audience in such a way as to remove from them the obstacles signified by those things in the parable. He would begin by seeking to rivet the attention of the careless and thoughtless, he would endeavour to deepen the sense of responsibility and seriousness in frivolous hearts, he would seek to wean the souls of others from the cares of this world, and the deceitful love of riches. It would be the same as to this, whatever particular point of doctrine he had to teach. In this way he would profit by the lesson of the Sower, rather than by repeating to his audience the exact lessons of the parable, in so many words. It would be easy to carry out this thought by tracing the practical import of each one of the succeeding parables in influencing the choice of the preacher in the arrangement of his materials. And if the parables are considered in this light, the words of our Lord on which we are commenting become very full indeed of divine meaning. We may almost take them as a promise that, in these few instructions of His, we shall always find what we want in the way of guidance for the selections that have to be made, what to avoid, what to keep back, what to insist on in the first instance, how to win the

heart before the mind is addressed, when to appeal to fear, when to hope, and also how confident we may be in the powers of the Word of God faithfully administered in the ordinance of preaching.

It does not, of course, follow from this that the parables have no direct importance as addressed to those who are in the place, rather of the crowds who understood them not, than of the Apostles to whom they were explained. Certainly no one can even read over such a parable as that of the Sower or of the Cockle in the field, or of the Treasure, or of the Seine, without finding many things which directly address themselves to his conscience. But this address is made in a different way from that which we find in the case of other teachings of our Lord. When we read the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, for instance, we feel at once that it has the particular and direct intention of striking at our slowness in forgiving one the other, our slight and trivial wrongs. When we read of the wise and foolish Virgins, we feel at once that we are touched on the point of our want of preparation for our Lord. In the series of parables before us, we are touched not on our behaviour to this or that particular truth or point of duty, but generally on that of the manner in which we receive or have received the Word of God which is brought home to us in so many different ways. Thus these parables in general are calculated, it may be said, to guide the teachers in their setting forth of what they have to teach, and to prepare the hearers to profit by it by receiving it in the only way in which it can be received with profit. For, in the Providence of God, these two things must go together, and the grace by means of which the Word of God is rightly and prudently administered and set forth, must be met, as it were, by the grace which enables the hearers of the Word to



receive, as it ought to be received, that divine gift. There is scarcely any truth that is contained in these parables for the guidance of the teachers of the Gospel, which has not also its great importance and pertinence to the hearers. It is well that they also should know of the many obstacles which may hinder the fruitfulness in their souls of the Word of God. It is well that they should understand that there may be in any Christian community, those who are there but on sufferance, and because the eye of the Great Householder sees in them the possibility of a future amendment and conversion, or for other causes of the same kind. They may well learn the powers of the engrafted word, as St. James speaks, and the heavenly doctrines contained in the parables of the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, and the rest, and certainly they cannot but profit by the warnings contained in the images of the Treasure and the Pearl, and the Seine or draw-net.

The influence of this body of teaching of our Lord's may be traced, without any great difficulty, through the course of the Apostolic preaching and teaching, as we have it preserved in the later books of the New Testament. The practical instructions of the Apostles, in the first place, of which we have so many scattered through the Epistles, are developments of the teaching of the first of the parables, that of the Sower. They are all, more or less, the securing of a good soil for the Divine seed of the Word of God. The same teaching is used by St. Paul in his Pastoral Epistles, in his instructions to his two chosen sons, St. Timothy and St. Titus. The teaching of the Parable of the Cockle is the foundation of a great body of magnificent instructions on the part of the same Apostle, as well as of St. Peter and St. John, the burthen of which is to warn their disciples against the devices of the evil one.

That great passage to the Ephesian priests, in St. Paul's Epistle to their Church, in which he begins by reminding them that their wrestling is not against flesh and blood, is an instance of this.<sup>2</sup> For the practical import of the second parable goes far beyond the precise point of the existence side by side, of the good seed and the bad. It extends certainly to the precept of the most careful vigilance on the part of the pastors of the flock against the approaches of the adversary who goes round about seeking whom he may devour. So also we see in the indulgence accorded by St. Paul to the incestuous Corinthians, in his second Epistle to that Church, the principle on which the toleration of the evil seed is allowed in the Church, namely, that it can be corrected and converted into the good. The whole lives of the great Apostles in their devotion to the ministry of the Word, is a commentary on the teaching of the third parable. They have gone forth, and preached everywhere, as St. Mark says at the end of his Gospel, precisely because they had the conviction that the good seed would be cared for by God, and would grow, as it were, of itself.

Nor can we find anywhere in the Gospels, except, perhaps, in our Lord's last discourse to the Apostles before His Passion, any more perfect illustration of the great doctrine of the Church as insisted on by St. Paul, than the truths contained in the image of the grain of mustard seed. In His last discourse our Lord uses the image of the Vine and the branches, rather than that of the mustard tree, and we must remember that He spoke those words immediately after He had instituted and administered the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, which would naturally suggest the image of the Vine. But the whole doctrine of the Unity of the Body of

<sup>2</sup> Ephes. vi. 10—18.



Christ may be drawn as well from the image of the mustard seed, as from that of the vine. For there can in each case be but one root, one tree, and to be separated from the one tree is to be cut off and doomed to destruction, after a short existence of sterility. St. Paul found it more useful for his purpose to use the image of the human body, for he had to insist on the mutual relations of the members one to the other, of the vital function which was committed to each part, and other truths for which that image was more opportune. This change of image, in setting forth the same doctrine, for the sake of giving prominence to some point of truth for which another image is less suited, is a perfect illustration of that prudent discretion of the Scribes of the Kingdom of Heaven which is depicted in our Lord's words about the new and the old.

Again, St. Paul's discourses at Athens and elsewhere to the Gentile audiences, which he addressed from time to time, as well as those of St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, as to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost and on other occasions, or to Cornelius and his friends when they were to be admitted to the Church, are perfect illustrations of the practical application, by skilful scribes, of the principle of the Parable of the Leaven. The same may be said of the arguments of St. Paul, in the Epistles to the Galatians, or to the Romans, or to the Hebrews. Always there is the fastening on that which he has in common with those to whom he is writing, the bringing out new truths from the old truths which they already possess, so that in the end they seem to have received afresh what they knew before, only in a new application and development. On the other hand, such Epistles as those of the Captivity, written when St. Paul was at Rome for the first time, uncertain as to his chance of escape from the tribunal of Nero, are full of the spirit

of the Parables of the Treasure and of the Pearl. The Gentile Christians, in particular, are like the man who came on the treasure unexpectedly, and they are carefully instructed as to its immense value. The warnings contained, for instance, in the earlier chapters of the Apocalypse of St. John, as well as those addressed by St. Paul even to his beloved disciples to whom the Pastoral epistles were written, may be considered also as practical applications of the teaching of the last of these parables, the Seine, which gathered fishes of every kind, which were afterwards most carefully sorted on the shore, and all that were unworthy cast away. Thus St. John, in our Lord's name, bids St. Timothy 'be mindful whence thou art fallen, and do penance, and do the first works,'<sup>3</sup> and the messages to the other bishops of the seven Churches are seldom devoid of some such warning.

Thus it may be seen how very rich and fruitful in instruction, for the special use of the teachers of the Gospel truth, is this great series of parables. In order to draw out their full fruitfulness, in order to catch the manifold variety and great extent of their teaching, it may indeed be necessary to look beyond that one direct and immediate point which is set forth, as it seems, as the main truth of each parable. It may be necessary, that is, to consider how to obviate the various evils which prevent souls from receiving duly the Word of God, as well as to know what those evils are. This remark suggests many very fruitful lines of instruction in connection with the first parable. It may be necessary to consider, in reference to the second parable, the whole of the very large subject of the activity and wiles of the evil one, and how they are to be met and counteracted, though all that is said about him is contained

<sup>3</sup> Apoc. ii. 2.



in the words, 'An enemy hath done this.' This use of these parabolic pictures may be exactly that which our Lord intends us to make of them. He may have given them to His Church for all time, as containing, in their pregnant brevity and many coloured wisdom, instructions to be drawn out to meet a thousand difficulties and to guide us through all the continually shifting snares which are devised by the enemies of the truth. The principles which they contain have to be applied every day, to ever new complications, and even conditions ever fresh. They are like the rules of navigation to the mariner, or the tactical or strategical principles of the scientific soldier. Thus it is most true to say that their practical use is like the bringing out of a store things new and old. And, again, it may be considered that the very form, in which these general teachings were cast by our Lord, may have been meant by Him as an indication of the value of the parabolic method in itself as an exposition of spiritual and moral truths. It is not simply, as it is sometimes said, an Oriental method. It is a method adapted to the instruction of all races, and all stages of society. The saints have constantly used it. Nowhere can we find a more pointed illustration of this truth than in so simple and pregnant a book as the *Spiritual Exercises*, in which we find St. Ignatius having recourse to the parables of the Kingdom of Christ, of Two Standards, of the Three Classes, and in which he describes the devil as a seducer from virtue, the general of an army, and a scolding wife.

It is hardly necessary to point out, in conclusion, how much this view of these first eight Parables agrees with what has so often been said, as to that which, at this period of His teaching, was the main object on which our Lord's Sacred Heart was bent. The time had not

yet come for Him to prepare directly for the Passion, or to preach the doctrine of the Cross. He was now mainly occupied in the formation of the Apostles. He was very soon to launch them forth, for a time, on their first essay in Evangelical preaching, when He was to send them away from His side, to go forth two and two, throughout a part of Galilee. Now, then, He was giving them, in this series of instructions, some guiding principles and rules of conduct for such work as that on which they were to be occupied, which they were to take up again after His own removal from them, and which was to be carried on by themselves and their successors to the end of time. And as long as the Church lasts in the world, so long will these eight parables remain the storehouse of guidance for her preachers. Nor will the treasures here contained be ever exhausted, or the practical wisdom of the parables become old and unavailing, as long as human nature remains what it is, and the malice of the devil, the deceitfulness of the world, and the all-powerful grace of God, remain what they are.

And lastly, it is well to repeat here what has already been said elsewhere of the Parables of our Lord in general, including those of which we have been speaking. The parables are full of divine and practical wisdom, and yet are, almost more than anything else, a great revelation of God and of His ways with men, imparted to us by our Lord. The principles and maxims which they contain are as true as they are, because He is Who He is, and because He has willed, in His dealings with men, to act on these principles. The time will come, after the consummation of all things, when the good seed has at last been gathered in the great harvest, when the cockle has been committed to the flames and the wheat garnered in the barns, when the sickle has been put forth, when the growth of the mustard-tree has reached



its utmost height, and all the three measures of meal leavened by the leaven, when the treasure and the pearl are safe for ever, and the fishes gathered in the net have been finally divided. Then the praises of Angels and men will break, like the waves of a sleepless sea, before the throne of God, because His Goodness and His Mercy and His Power, and His Holiness, and His Wisdom, have been manifested in His dealings with His creatures in a long and marvellous history, the whole principles of which were sketched by our Lord nineteen hundred years ago as He spoke to the people and to His Apostles by the Lake of Gennesareth.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *The Followers of the Son of Man.*

St. Matt. viii. 18—22 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 63.

ST. MATTHEW places, as it seems, at this point of the narrative, a small number of similar incidents which may have taken place almost at any moment during the period of the Public Life of our Lord. This Evangelist, as is well known, does not follow the order of time, and he has transposed the incident of the night voyage on the lake, of which we shall have to speak in the next chapter, in order to place it among a number of other instances of miraculous power, immediately after his account of the Sermon on the Mount. We learn from St. Mark and St. Luke, whose notes of time are very carefully given, that this voyage, and the storm which arose while our Lord was asleep in the vessel, followed on the teaching by parables of which we have now been

speaking for several chapters. There cannot be any difficulty to those who have studied the Harmony of the Gospels on right principles, in accounting for the transposition as made by St. Matthew. It might therefore be unnecessary to connect the incidents of which we shall speak in the present chapter with the parables on the one hand, and with the storm on the lake on the other hand, especially as St. Luke places these, or incidents of the same kind, at a later period of his history. There is only a single reason for the connection here, namely, that St. Matthew has placed the two incidents presently to be mentioned, between the account of the embarkation of our Lord and that of the storm on the lake. But there can be no reason for this in St. Matthew, unless there was some connection of time. For the insertion of these incidents here is a kind of digression on his part from the main course of his narrative, which consists here of a chain of miracles of various kinds. There is therefore good reason for considering these incidents in this place. We know from St. Mark and St. Luke that the voyage took place at this time, that is, after the teaching of the people by our Lord in the form of parables, and we may therefore, on St. Matthew's authority, consider here the incidents by which it was preceded.

The first and the third Gospels contain altogether three incidents of the kind of which we are to speak. They are so similar in character that it is natural to suppose that the Evangelists have grouped them together, as far as this has been done, for the sake of collecting in one place the teaching of our Lord on the point to which these incidents refer. This may account for the different points of the history at which they are mentioned by St. Matthew and by St. Luke respectively. It is probable that one occasion of an occurrence of this kind was where they are placed by St. Matthew, and that another and



later occasion of an occurrence of the same kind took place where they are placed by St. Luke. Each Evangelist joined the other incident or incidents to the one which he mentioned, St. Luke finding, as was his wont, an anecdote resembling what St. Matthew had mentioned and not absolutely identical with it. In this manner there is no difficulty as to the explanation of the apparent divergence between the narratives. The anecdotes are two in St. Matthew, and three in St. Luke. The probability is that, in this as in other cases, the Evangelists had a large number of very similar anecdotes to choose from, the same thing happening with a number of persons, and our Lord using to them all the same proverbial answer. Not only must our Lord have had to settle the same questions, over and over again, in the same way, but the incidents were such as were certain to occur to the Apostles at a later time, and to the directors of souls over and over again in all ages of the Church. Thus their value and importance are easily seen, for the principles which our Lord sets forth in His answers on these occasions have to be applied almost daily in dealing with questions raised by vocations, either to the religious life or to the sacred ministry in the Catholic Church. Thus it may be said that the Gospels would be incomplete without these anecdotes—almost as incomplete as they would be if they contained nothing about what are usually called the Evangelical Counsels of Perfection.

‘ And a certain Scribe came and said to Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus saith to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. And another of His disciples said to Him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead.’

Another similar answer of our Lord is added to those two by St. Luke, when he comes to insert, in its proper chronological place, the incidents which he gives, exactly parallel to those which are put first and second by St. Matthew. It will be enough here to speak of those words of our Lord which are recorded for us by the first Evangelist. It is these words of His which constitute the main value of the anecdotes. The Evangelists show us this, by not even telling us how our Lord's answers were received in each case. In order more completely to understand the circumstances, it must be remembered that our Lord had been absent from Capharnaum for a considerable time, occupied in His Apostolical circuit of Galilee, and changing the spot at which He was to be found almost day by day. Then He had come back suddenly to Capharnaum and its close neighbourhood. It was a place of danger to Him, on account of the determination of His enemies to kill Him, and we know that a league for that purpose had been actually formed between the Pharisees and Scribes on the one hand, and the officials of the Tetrarch Herod on the other. The knowledge of this probably occasioned the immediate visit of our Blessed Lady and His brethren to the place where He was teaching the people. After a very short period of teaching indeed, therefore, we find our Lord departing, as we shall see in the next chapter. Even while He did teach, He took the precaution of remaining in the boat a little distance from the land, and it was now that He began that veiled and parabolic teaching of which we have lately had to speak so much. It would therefore not have been easy for individuals to come to Him with their personal requests or private difficulties at this time. This may explain how it is that the first incident belonging to the present chapter occurred when it did occur.



‘And a certain Scribe came and said to Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!’ If this was said in the presence of others, as is probable from the place in which, as has been said, St. Matthew inserts the story, there may have been a certain amount of display and outward profession of loyalty and devotion which might jar upon our Lord’s Heart. When a true vocation to the closer following of our Lord has been addressed to the soul, it is not the manner of the Holy Ghost to vent it in public demonstrations, which only serve to expose the precious germ to the cold air of common life, to waste the force of the Divine impulse, and even to expose it to the perversion of a false motive. Our Lord checked this person, as He afterwards checked the young man who came running to Him, and calling Him Good Master, asking what he should do to possess eternal life. Moreover, from the answer here given by our Lord to the proposal of this Scribe, it would seem that His all-piercing Eye discerned in him some human motives of ambition, the hope of distinction and earthly gain or earthly glory. It is not wonderful that there should have been many in whose hearts the triumphant progress of the new Kingdom might wake up ambitions of this kind. The Jewish ideas of the coming King were ordinarily carnal and worldly, and up to this time our Lord had not begun to preach the doctrine of the Cross. By the good Providence of His Father, He and His immediate followers were already objects of dislike, suspicion, and persecution to those in power, but this need not have been patent to the eyes of every one. Moreover, the miraculous powers which had been displayed by our Lord seemed to place within His reach any earthly success whatever to which He might aspire. We find, at a much later period than this, that the favoured Apostles and near relatives of our Lord,

St. James and St. John, the sons of Zebedee and Salome, could entertain projects of ambition as to their own places in the future Kingdom. It is not therefore any rash supposition that motives of this kind may have had some share in this action of the Scribe. He came uninvited, uncalled, he volunteered his allegiance almost as if it were a great thing for him to give, or as if he conferred a favour by his proffer of it.

‘And Jesus saith to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.’ Thus He spoke directly to the heart of this man, touching him on his wound to the quick, as He afterwards touched the hidden weak place in the heart of the rich young man. The Scribe had said nothing about riches, or possessions, or home, or honour, or repute among men, all which things are able to secure their possessor from poverty, want, friendlessness. His words, indeed, included a readiness to be exposed to the want of all resources and comforts of every kind, for he had said that he would follow our Lord whithersoever He might go. But our Lord saw that his ideas of that following were not at all those of a man who looks forward to actual privation, destitution, contempt, danger. So He answered him with all the Divine prudence which the case required. His words are not, what they may sound to us if they are taken out of their context, a kind of complaint of the hardships of His daily life, and the great ingratitude with which all His exertions for the salvation of souls were met. He did not mean to blame those who left Him homeless and shelterless, for all the privations of His Apostolical life were very dear to Him, chosen by Him for the sake of those for whom He laboured, and still more for the sake of those who were to join Him in those labours, or to follow in after times along the same glorious path. But,



just because they were so dear to Him and so profitable to them, He was bound, in His infinite charity, to set before this light-hearted and self-confident aspirant to the honours of the Apostleship, the severe external conditions, the hardships and mortification which that life involved. If they were taken away from the life which His immediate followers had to lead, that life would lose its beauty, its power, its fruitfulness.

Thus we see that our Lord here puts His finger, so to speak, on at least two of the great impediments which have, in all times of the Church, stood in the way of the perfect following of His example in the Apostolic life, and which have also prevented those who have followed Him imperfectly from producing any large fruit in souls. These two impediments are, first, inconsiderateness and want of reflection in taking up the obligations, whether of religious life, of the sacred ministry, or of the specially Apostolic career, as is the case with missionaries to the heathen, and, in the second place, anything that savours of ambition and self-interest, the love of being first, even in those successes and honours which belong to Apostolic men, and, much more, the readiness to serve the altar or to preach the Gospel for the sake of earthly gains. Our Lord spoke of this inconsiderateness at a later stage of His teaching. ‘Which of you, having a mind to build a tower, doth not first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he hath wherewith to finish it? lest, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that see begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.’<sup>1</sup> Our Lord did not say this to the Scribe on this occasion because, perhaps, He saw that his inconsiderate proffer of service was made, not only without due reflection on his own powers and capacities of endurance, but also

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke xiv. 28, 29.

under the influence of an entirely false calculation as to the character of the life which he would have to lead. So He began with correcting this false impression, that from the consideration of the truth as to the circumstances of the Apostolical life, he might be led on to a more serious self-examination as to his own powers. So He only said, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head,' thus simply setting before him, as it is right to do in all such cases, the difficulties and hardships of that for which he volunteered, rather than the immense advantages and consolations. He could have spoken of these, indeed, as He hinted at them in His words to the rich young man afterwards, when He told him that he should have treasure in Heaven, and, above all, when He invited him, 'Come, and follow Me!'—for in that invitation, to those who could understand it, was contained the promise of the sweetest happiness, even on earth, that the human heart is capable of enjoying. But to the Scribe, in His Divine wisdom, He contented Himself with the simple, cold, bare declaration of the hardships he would have to undergo.

A very little familiarity with the lives of the saints and the annals of religious orders is enough to explain this conduct on the part of our Lord. The religious life, or the life of a priest, or the life of a missionary, may have, in the Providence of God, to last on for many decades of years, and such an edifice, to use the image of our Lord, cannot possibly be carried on to its final perfection and completeness unless it have a very solid foundation. The glow of enthusiasm, with which such lines of life are sometimes taken up, soon fades away. Nothing is strong enough to carry the soul on through years of labour, obedience, privation, often, too, of disappointment and of great loneliness, but the conviction of the will of God



in the first instance, and the constant vigilant practice of self-conquest in the second. On the other hand, a true call from God will enable a manly soul to triumph over the discouragement and difficulties which are set in its path. When our Lord, a little after this, said to the Apostles, Will you also go away? St. Peter answered Him, to Whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. So it would have been with this Scribe, if the impulse which made him offer himself to our Lord came, in truth, from God. Let it be, he would have said, that the Son of Man has not where to lay His head—where He is, there also let His servant be. The call comes from One Who is able to accomplish His own work in me.

The other instance of a similar reply given by our Lord in this passage of St. Matthew touches a different point, so to say, in the dealings of God with regard to high vocations. The two cases mentioned by St. Luke, further on, are exactly identical in principle with these two in St. Matthew. 'And another of His disciples said to Him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said to Him, Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead.' In this case, then, the man who makes the application to our Lord is already a disciple. He is, indeed, more than an ordinary disciple. For he feels himself bound to ask leave from our Lord to go and bury his father. He must therefore have been already bound to our Lord by some tie of close companionship, if not by that kind of obedience which a religious subject owes to his Superior. Thus, in this case, there is no question of his joining himself to our Lord for the first time. He has already received and obeyed the vocation to the Apostolical life. But he has, as he conceives, a good reason, of duty, or at least of charity, for leaving that life for a time, to go and bury his

father. It is not certain whether the father was already dead, in which case the request was merely that he might take his part in the mourning and in the funeral, which could not be long. Or the father may have been an old man, ailing and in need of the assistance of his son, and the request may have been for leave to live with and tend him until his death. In this case the delay would have been of indefinite length. There is no reason for thinking that the plea alleged was a false plea. This, then, is the second incident of this kind set before us by St. Matthew.

Our Lord meets the case directly on its own merits, in order, we cannot doubt, to leave behind Him in the Church a clear and unmistakeable instruction, which would extend to all such cases. So He does not say that the father is already sufficiently provided for, or anything of that kind, although His words may perhaps imply that it was so. It is not on that that He rests the refusal of the leave which is asked of Him. 'Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead.' These words, like others in which our Lord spoke of the divisions which He had come to cause in families, the sword He was to send on the earth rather than peace, and the like, sound harshly on the ears of many, almost as if there was in them something inconsistent with the gentleness and tenderness of the Sacred Heart. The contrary is the truth. Words such as these come from the Sacred Heart, precisely on account of its intense sweetness and love, which make it shrink from all false glosses on the rights of God, or the supremacy of our duties to Him, or the inferiority of all human claims, and from all concealment of the immense miseries which we may incur by allowing the softnesses and delicacies of human affection to come in the way of the sacrifices which we may be called on to make for Him—sacrifices certainly fraught with immense rewards



and blessings, not only to ourselves but to those whom we may seem to wound by making them. Our Lord would not have called this man to follow Him, if his care had been, in truth, necessary to his father. When He calls one out of a family, a son or a daughter from the side of a parent, a brother from a number of sisters dependent on him, and the like, He does so with the fullest consideration for those who are left behind. He takes them into His own special care, for, if He takes away from them what is their natural prop and resource, He is bound by so doing to supply the gap which He makes, and although He may supply it in ways which they do not at once recognize, He is certain to supply it in His own manner of overwhelming and transcendent magnificence. Where, then, there is a true call, as in the case before us, that call must be attended to at once, because it is the call of Him Who is the Sovereign Lord of all souls and of all lives. The supreme authority of our Lord at once cancels the claims of any minor duty. And, far more than that, as He is infinitely wise, infinitely good, and infinitely powerful, there can be no doubt at all but that what He does in this way will certainly turn out to the immense good of those who seem to suffer by it, and thus the only reason that could be adduced in defence of disobedience is at once removed. Nor are there any more miserable parents in the world, than those who have succeeded in prevailing on their children to be inattentive to the call of God for their sakes. They are sure to suffer, even in this life, from the very children whom they have kept back from God.

The concluding words of our Lord, 'Let the dead bury their dead,' must contain a truth of their own, for the sake of which they were spoken. All the more must this be so, because at first sight these words may appear to sound harsh and unfeeling. It cannot be truly so

with any words of our Lord. But that He should use words which may appear severe, is a proof that He had before His mind reasons which made it both wise and tender and most loving, to warn us against a great danger which might present itself to many souls under the garb of natural affection, piety, and dutifulness. The dead may be understood in various ways. Our Lord may mean those who are dead in sin, or He may mean those who have not the faith, or He may mean those whom we have once for all left and parted from as if death itself had divided us. The first of these three meanings, if applied here, might involve the condemnation of the family of this disciple as being sinners. The second interpretation might seem to imply that the faithful have no duties at all to those who have not the faith. In each case the meaning would seem to involve a greater amount of severity than the occasion demanded. Our Lord sometimes, as we shall see, sent to their homes those who offered to cast in their lot with Him as His companions. But here He refuses to allow one of His companions to go to his home, on an occasion when he might naturally be expected there to discharge a holy duty. The reason for the refusal is most naturally to be found in the truth, that this man was called to the preaching of the Gospel, that for all such it was to be a law of the Kingdom that they must be entirely free from family ties and home duties, and, in the last place, that for this particular soul the desire to go home was a snare which might entangle him, and lead him in the end to lose his high calling. If this be so, then the third meaning seems the best. The 'dead' were those whom he had quitted once for all, not because they were sinners or because they were faithless, but because God had called him to leave all and follow our Lord alone.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### *The Storm on the Lake.*

St. Matt. viii. 28—34 ; St. Mark v. 1—21 ; St. Luke viii. 26—40 ;  
*Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 64.

WE now come to the history of one of those miracles of our Lord which are more than miracles, because they have evidently a purpose in His Sacred Heart beyond that of the simple exhibition of supernatural power for the relief of human distress or need, thereby to accredit the Divine mission which He was discharging on earth. It has already been said, that many of these parabolic miracles, so to call them, were connected with the Lake, which had been to His disciples a kind of second home, in the days when they were but poor fishermen, supporting themselves and their families by the sometimes dangerous and always venturesome occupation from which He called them to become fishers of men. These miracles of the Lake have also a kind of prophetic import, as they represent, as we cannot but think, certain features in the coming history of the Church, which was to be founded on the Apostles. Thus there is a threefold meaning about the incidents of this class in the Life of our Lord, and if they are taken together and arranged in a series of Divine manifestations, it is easy to see how wonderfully they have been ordained, and how mercifully they have been recorded, for all generations in the Church. This threefold meaning of miracles of this class enables us

very easily to divide our considerations concerning them into heads corresponding to these meanings, dealing with them first as belonging to the chain of miracles, then as having a parabolic import, and lastly in their prophetic relation to the history of the Church, which resembles in so many ways the fortunes of a ship tossed about on a raging sea, which our Lord is able to calm by a word.

‘And sending away the multitudes, they take Him as He was in the ship.’ This is the account of the accurate St. Mark. The two other Evangelists speak more generally, beginning the account of the incident at an earlier moment in the day, before they had sent away the crowds who had been gathered round the shore to listen to our Lord. ‘And when He entered into the boat, His disciples followed Him.’ ‘And it came to pass on a certain day, that He went up into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them, let us go over to the other side of the Lake.’ The fact seems to have been, that, on ordinary occasions when our Lord taught from the poop of the boat, the Apostles were not always with Him on board, but some of them, perhaps, with the multitudes on the shore, where they may have been useful in arranging the crowd, and in other ways. On this occasion they either accompanied our Lord, in the first instance, into the boat, so as to be ready, when the instruction was over, for the sail across the Lake, or they joined Him, in the boat, when the instruction came to an end, and when the crowds were dismissed. Our Lord’s motive in thus crossing the Lake without returning to the town, when the day’s work was at an end, may perhaps have been in part, one of precaution, on account of the very watchful and insidious manner in which His steps at this time were haunted by His enemies. There were two great reasons



for the precautions which He habitually took at this period. One of these was the simple securing of His personal safety, for His time was not yet come, and He was, in a manner, bound not to neglect the ordinary care requisite under such circumstances. The other reason was one of charity, and, we see it very powerful in its operation on His conduct at this time, and perhaps it had even more influence in the direction of His movements than the other. This reason was founded on His great reluctance to provoke His enemies, who had now reached the stage of desperate hostility to Him, which made them hesitate at no sin, when it was required by their opposition to His influence. We can see from the manner in which the Evengelists mention the repeated blasphemies against the Holy Ghost, of which these men ran the risk whenever there was no other way open to them of denying the argument from His miracles, that our Lord hated so much this detestable sin of theirs as deliberately to avoid, as far as possible, anything that might occasion it. He could not now be in the midst of populations like that of Galilee, where His miraculous power was so well known, and where He had so often exerted it for the benefit of sufferers of every kind, without being constantly exposed to the demands made on his charity by ever fresh appeals to Him for relief of this kind. But as soon as He wrought any conspicuous miracle, the Scribes and Pharisees were there, ready with their calumny that He cast out devils by means of the Prince of the devils. Thus He had this further reason for continually withdrawing Himself from the public gaze at this time.

‘And there were other ships with Him. And they launched forth. And when they were sailing, He slept, And there came down a storm of wind upon the Lake, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was

covered with waves, and the waves beat into the ship, so that the ship was filled, and they were in danger. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, sleeping upon a pillow.' The words of the several Evangelists describe what was not uncommon on the Lake of Galilee. The Lake is deeply sunken in the land, and, on one side at least, it has ranges of mountains broken by several valleys running down to the shore. The consequence of this is that its waters are liable to frequent and sudden gusts of violent winds, rushing down the valleys and causing furious storms, of which there is often no warning. Boats are often caught unawares and lost in such tempests. It seems that the storm of which the Evangelists speak was of this kind, though it may have been raised by some special action of diabolical hatred to our Lord and His disciples, or permitted by Him for the sake of the miracle which He intended to work, and of the lesson which it was to convey. 'And they came and awakened Him, and say to Him, Master, we perish, doth it not concern Thee that we perish? Lord save us, we perish! And Jesus saith to them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? And rising up He rebuked the wind and the rage of the water, and said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm. And He said to them, Why are you fearful, have ye not faith yet? Where is your faith? And they feared exceedingly, and the men wondered, and they said one to another, Who is this, think you, what manner of Man is this, that He commandeth both the winds and the sea, and they obey Him? "

The order of the incidents is tolerably clear, from a comparison of the narratives of the several Evangelists. It seems that our Lord rebuked the disciples, both



before He spoke to the winds and waters, and also after He had done so. His first rebuke was in answer to their appeal to Him, after they had awakened Him, and then He repeated His rebuke after the waves and winds had ceased their violence. In order to understand how far the disciples deserved the reproach of want of faith, we must remind ourselves of certain truths as to the Sacred Humanity of our Lord. We read in the Gospels of His being hungry, and wearied, and thirsty, and the like, as we read here of His sleeping. It must be remembered that these natural sufferings and weaknesses, were not with Him as with us. With us both are the necessities of nature, from which no one can be exempt except by some special favour or dispensation. In the case of our Lord, it was not as with us. The rights of His Body, had He used them, might have exempted Him from all weaknesses, from the necessity of food, sleep, rest, and the like. But when He took on Him a passible Body, it does not seem that He absolutely exempted it from all natural needs of every kind, although the sufferings possibly consequent on all such needs were not with Him, as with us, necessary and independent of His will in each case. When He is said to have hungered or been thirsty or weary, and the rest, He is said so, because He then took on Him, for that time or occasion, and for some Divine purpose, the particular pain or effect of which mention is made. Further, we cannot think that with Him the time of sleep was that same time of inaction or relaxation of the intellectual consciousness and self-mastery of the soul which it is in us. The Spouse says in the Canticles, *Ego dormio, cor autem meum vigilat*, and we are told of some of the saints of God that, even in their sleep, they have been able to continue their attention to Him and their prayer. It is only

natural to think that this was ordinary with our Lord.<sup>1</sup>

It is not meant by this that our Lord did not usually sleep or take food, and the like. For if this had not been so, there might have been a doubt raised as to the reality of His Human Nature, and thus it must be thought that He was constantly giving evidence in this way that He was a man like other men. But the knowledge of this truth is of importance to us, and it is even required for the full intelligence of what passed on this occasion. For a lively and full faith, on this point, would have been enough of itself to prevent the Apostles from awakening our Lord, as if He was less able to hear them and to help them, less powerful over the elements, while asleep than while awake. We may remember how the Prophet Elias ridiculed the false God of the priests of Achab and Jezebel, on the occasion of the sacrifice on Mount Carmel, when no answer came to their prayer—‘Cry with a louder voice, for he is a God, and perhaps he is talking, or is in an inn, or on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awaked.’<sup>2</sup> Where there was a true and perfect faith in the Divinity of our Lord, there would certainly have been a reverent reluctance to arouse Him from the sleep which He had chosen to allow Himself, as if He and those with Him could be lost while He was with them, whether sleeping or waking. In the case of the Ark of God, in the times of David, Oza was struck dead for putting out his hand to save, as he thought, the Ark from falling from the carriage in which it was conveyed.<sup>3</sup> And there might have been something of the same want of reverence in

<sup>1</sup> We follow here the opinion of Toletus, to whom Cornelius a Lapide refers his readers. See Toletus, *In Luc.* c. viii. and also see his *Enarratio in Summam S. Thomæ*, p. III, qu. xiv. seq.

<sup>2</sup> 3 Kings xviii. 27.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings vi. 7.



rousing up our Lord prematurely, but that the faith of the Apostles, or of the men with them in the boat, was so infirm, and that the sudden danger might be their excuse for their want of perfect consideration. And we cannot doubt that our Lord's words to the Apostles convey a kind of complaint as to their backwardness in this perfect faith, to which He had been so long leading them on by means of their constant intercourse with Himself and the revelations concerning Him of which the Providential dealings of His Father were so full. It can hardly be that He meant to reproach the other mariners in the ship with incredulity, for ordinary persons could not be expected to have that knowledge of Him which the Apostles might by this time have gained.

It is also observable that the word 'faith' in the New Testament, means sometimes not so much faith in the abstract, as confidence in God and in our Lord, founded on faith. And it seems as if this were the proper meaning in this place, as when later on, on this same Lake, when St. Peter had asked to be enabled to come to our Lord walking on the waters, and began to fear and so to sink, our Lord addressed him as one 'of little faith.' It was not so much faith that was wanting to the Apostle, as the confidence with which he ought to have trusted to our Lord's word, bidding him come. So here, if the Apostles had been calmly asked to state their belief about our Lord, it is not probable that their confession would have stopped far short of that afterwards made by St. Peter. But if this were so, then they might have known that where He was, whether asleep or awake, they were safe with Him, and that no power, on earth nor in Heaven, or the whole multitude of the fiends of Hell, could harm them unless He permitted them so to do. The perfection, therefore, of faith was

wanting to them, manifesting itself in absolute confidence, which would have prompted them indeed to pray to Him, or to have recourse to Him in any other way, but which was inconsistent with the flurry and alarm which made them disturb His sleep, and almost reproach Him for having allowed the danger to go as far as it had gone.

The circumstance of the rebuke spoken by our Lord to the winds and waves seems to have been distorted by some heretics, as if it implied that the elements had a kind of animated life, and could hear the words and understand them. But our Lord would use human language for the sake of those who witnessed the miracle, and if He had not done so there might have been no evident proof that the storm did not cease of itself as suddenly as it had begun, and from the same kind of natural cause. And if, as has been sometimes thought, this tempest was contrived and brought about by the evil spirits, either from their general enmity to our Lord, or because they may have dreaded the work of mercy which He was about to work on arriving at the shore for which He was bound, then the language of our Lord may have been directly addressed to them. The other circumstance in the case, namely, that there was a great calm immediately, is noticed by some writers as showing the miraculous power of the words of our Lord. For, under ordinary circumstances, although the wind might have ceased suddenly, the waves could not have subsided, except after some interval of time. And there is often about the miraculous works of our Lord this character of perfect completeness, no single circumstance of all that could be thought of to make the benefit absolutely perfect in its own kind. For He does not what He begins by halves, and thus it is sometimes noticed in persons who have had some marvellous cure or grace



conferred on them, at some shrine or by the interposition of some saint, that they are not afterwards molested by pain or trouble of the same kind as that from which they have thus been delivered.

This cannot quite be called the first occasion on which our Lord had shown His power over nature. For in a certain sense, the former miracle on the Lake, that of the marvellous fishing, may be considered as coming under this head. Still even that marvellous manifestation must have been far less striking, in its effects upon the mind and imagination, than this stilling of the tempest. The great forces of the natural elements are things far above the power of man, and he feels himself puny and helpless, indeed, in the presence of some of the great outbursts of these forces which are occasionally witnessed—all the more if it happens that he is not simply a spectator, but a plaything, so to say, in the hands of the great powers which are set in motion. As these great powers of nature bring home to us the might of God Who made them, so certainly the exercise of any control over them, on the part of men like ourselves, is a most overwhelming proof of the communication to them of the powers of God. And in the case before us, our Lord had acted with supreme power and authority. He had not prayed, or invoked any power but His own. He had spoken to the winds and waves as their Master, and in ordinary experience they had no Master. All the wisdom and science and skill of man were utterly powerless before them. And yet, at a word, the winds and the waves had obeyed Him. Thus while the malignant Pharisees in Capharnaum, by the very enormity of the wickedness on which they were so ready to rush in their hostility to Him, had, as it were, fettered His power in the healing of disease and the driving out of devils, because He was so loth to provoke them to

blasphemy, these poor fishermen of the Lake, who had accompanied Him and His Apostles, were allowed to be the witnesses of a miracle which even these Scribes could hardly have found means to calumniate, and He manifested to them His hidden Godhead in a way they could hardly mistake. Thus fear is the first feeling of which the Evangelists speak in them. For fearful as was the storm itself, still more fearful was the power now manifested of quelling the storm with a word. ‘And they feared exceedingly, and they said one to another, Who is this, thinkest thou, that both wind and sea obey Him?’ It may also have been by a special arrangement of Providence that this experience of theirs of the Divine power, manifested by our Lord in the quelling the tempest, should have been a kind of preparation of their minds and hearts for the great display of a similar power, over the spiritual storms by which souls can be beset, which was awaiting them on their landing in the country of the Gerasenes. Not that our Lord had not often, before this time, shown His power over the devils, or that any instance of possession had not very dreadful aspects, but that certainly we have no instance recorded for us of this awful scourge in the Gospels, so terrible as that which was soon to be set before them.

This is the simple history of the miracle, and we may proceed at once to those other aspects of the narrative of which mention has been made. It was said that there was here a parable and a prophecy as well as a miracle. The parable consists in this, that the circumstances of this incident are contrived, so to speak, in the Providence of God, as to set before us a perfect picture of that which frequently takes place in the history of souls, especially of those who are watchful over their own movements, and over the dealings of God with them. On such souls it is frequently God’s way, to



allow the sudden storms of temptation to sweep down, as the blast of wind in this history swept down through one of the gullies or narrow valleys along the eastern shore of the sea of Galilee. This tempest seems to have taken place in the evening, if not in the night, and this circumstance must have added greatly to the fearfulness of the trial to which the faith and the confidence of the Apostles were exposed. Thus, then, we have here a perfect image of a soul overwhelmed by darkness and gloom, deprived of all spiritual consolation and light, and at the same time beset by temptations, and doubts, and difficulties of many kinds, strong and bewildering in themselves, but made still more so by the malice and cunning of the enemies of mankind, who are permitted at such times to do almost their worst, though they are all the time held back by the supreme power of God, Who measures carefully every item of the forces which He allows them to set in motion. In such a condition of the soul, it is apparently left to itself, as the mariners in the boat on the Lake seemed to be abandoned by our Lord, Who slept as if He had no care for them. They are tempted by the worst of temptations, that of despair, for they think that there is no longer help for them even in our Lord Himself. They have perhaps been accustomed from time to time to enjoy His sensible presence in the form of light and consolation, and then they have feared no assaults of their spiritual enemies, because that sensible presence of His was enough to animate them and make them secure. But all this is now at an end, and as the ship seemed to be covered by the waves, so the soul in this state seems to be altogether submerged in a sea of temptations and in tribulations.

Happy indeed are such souls, if they follow the example of the disciples, in the manner in which it may be harmlessly and profitably followed, that is, by rousing

up our Lord, not indeed in any way that involves want of confidence and weakness of faith, still less any want of perfect respect or perfect submission to His will, but in the manner in which He delights to be besieged and beset and importuned by us, that is, by constant and fervent and urgent prayer for help. Persons in despair do not pray, but good Christian souls, under the storms of temptation and sorrows of every kind, are driven by their sufferings and trials to the blessed remedy of prayer, whereby they testify their own faith and confidence in Him. And then He arises, as it were, from sleep. For all along He has not been far from them. He has been with them, but, as it were, in that Divine sleep which alone He can allow, not manifesting His presence by any external sign, while He has been at the centre of the soul, because it has been His presence there which has been its strength in resistance, and the cause of that distressed and anxious love which has made it so fearful of offending Him, so troubled by the evil suggestions to which it may have been exposed, and so faithful in its course to Him in prayer and supplication. And at a word from Him the miracle of the Lake is repeated. For He has but to bestir Himself, if we use such language, and all the powers of Hell and all the passions of human nature, which these powers may have succeeded in lashing into fury, as the waves were lashed into fury by the winds, all are at once subdued, and a great calm succeeds as if there had been no storm for Him to quell. For where He is, there is light and grace, always the grace that is sufficient for the conquering of the temptations which have arisen, and when He chooses the soul is at once filled to the brim with joy and delight and courage and peace, feeling that all its enemies are placed under its feet, and that it can do all things in Him Who is its strength. And the fruit of the trial is an increase



of faith and at the same time of holy and loving fear, for there has been a fresh manifestation, alike of the power of the spiritual enemies of man and of the innate weakness of our nature, if it were left to itself, and also of the intimate presence of God in the soul, and of the instantaneous effect of a single divine word. The Apostles were in some degree trained by these miracles of the Lake, for the discharge of their future great duties in the guidance and ruling of souls of all characters, and they went forth from the experience of this night voyage, as from other similar incidents of which we shall have to speak, with a large increase of knowledge of our Lord and of His power, as well as of the confidence with which they were ready to brave any danger in His company. Thus this incident of the tempest came very beautifully on the end of those instructions in the principles of the Kingdom which had been given to them so lately in the first series of parables.

Moreover, it must be added that the parabolic import of this miracle is not to be confined to the consolation which may be derived from it, in the assurance that it may give, that, in the spiritual storms to which the souls of the followers of our Lord are liable, they may rely on His aid and trust that they have Him with them, even when they experience in themselves none of the sensible joy in His presence which it is their lot at other times to feel. The lesson is not merely that when such times of trial come, our Lord is still there to help and sustain them. It extends further, to a sketch of that which is actually the regular course of things with such souls. It implies that their ordinary experience shall be, and ought to be, such as is represented in the miracle. We are to expect tempests and disturbances, and, as St. Peter says in his Epistle, we are not to be surprised at them or count them as something strange. They are the natural

and regular incidents of our spiritual warfare, just as battles and scares and sudden attacks are the natural incidents of the life of soldiers on a campaign in the country of an enemy. They are to be expected, and it is to be more a strange thing and a matter of surprise, if they do not occur, than if they do occur. But, further, we are taught by the miracle, viewed in the light in which we are now regarding it, that under these conditions of our warfare, to which we must make up our minds and at which we are in no wise to be frightened, we shall have with us, unless we drive Him away by some fault of our own, the presence of our Lord in our hearts, a presence like that of One Who is asleep indeed, but Whose Heart is awake, according to the words of the Canticle already quoted. He can no more forsake us than He forsook the Apostles in the ship. But He requires of us, as He required of them, the exercise of the faith that He has given us, the patience, and courage, and endurance, and confidence, which are due from us to Him. As it was a deficiency of faith, in the eyes of our Lord, to be too anxious and full of fear, under those circumstances of the storm, even though the boat was covered by the waves, so it is not the way of the strong saints of God to be too much alarmed and cast down by the assaults of this kind, to which He subjects them in His providential guidance of their souls. The storm was allowed by Him to test, and, in the end, to strengthen the faith of the disciples. It was a step in the gradual formation in their hearts of that perfect and unshaken faith in His divinity which was required in them, before they could be made the foundation stones of the Church. So in the experience of the saintly souls of which we speak, the trials of this kind to which they are exposed, form an essential part of the discipline of God with regard to them, and therefore to leave them out, as it



were, from the process of their training for their high places in the Kingdom, would be contrary to the ordinary method by which God provides for their growth in perfection.

These thoughts naturally prepare us for the consideration of what may be called the prophetical meaning of the miracle of the storm on the Lake calmed by our Lord. These miracles, as has been said, may well be considered as foreshadowing the fortunes of the Catholic Church in the world. This also was one of the many points of instruction as to which it was very important that our Lord should enlighten the minds of the Apostles, and of those who were to come after them in the Church. It is needless to say how many traces we have in the Gospel history of the very natural truth, that the minds and thoughts, even of the most intimate companions of our Lord, were very far indeed from the comprehension of the conditions under which the Church was to be launched on the world. When they came to see how mighty and various were His miracles, showing Him to be possessed of all the power of the Godhead over creatures, they would very naturally, in one sense of the word, take up with notions as to the future of the Kingdom far more in harmony with the carnal ideas of the Jews, as to the reign of the Messiah, than with the anticipations of the Sacred Heart. There were many passages in the prophecies which might have been quoted by them in support of these views, for the words of the prophets require to be, in many cases, spiritually understood, and this kind of interpretation was not familiar to the Jewish schools. It is one of the most beautiful parts of the Divine Providence over the Church, that her fortunes in the world are so gradually unfolded, and that it is so seldom that even her wisest children are able to forecast the immediate future. But our Lord's

time was very short, and He had a great difficulty, on account of the state of the hearts of those with whom He had to deal, in unfolding to them what may be called the principles of the history of His Kingdom in this world. But He could at least leave these, and other points of the same kind, sketched for them in miracles and parables, and in miracles that were in themselves parables, just as He left the reprobation of the synagogue foretold in the miracle of the withered fig-tree. These would be interpreted for the Apostles by the Holy Ghost, a part of Whose office it would be to bring to their remembrance what had passed in His lifetime and what had been said by Him. And, after the Apostles, these things would remain for ever in the narrative of the Evangelists, for the consolation and illumination of the Church of all generations.

In this aspect, the miracle before us becomes, like that of the wonderful fishing, a prophecy of what was to be so often found in the Christian ages. The Church is assailed by storms and tempests of every kind, the powers of hell are furious against her, the princes of this world are either hostile, or faithless in her defence, her own children are among her most malicious enemies, wounding her heart with the special malice of heresy and schism, she is constantly on the very verge, as it seems, of destruction, most like indeed to a ship tossed about by winds and waves at their will, helpless and hopeless, covered by the water already, and on the point of finally sinking beneath them. Her own apostate children, the infidel powers, the followers of the false Prophet, the subterranean plotters against faith, religion, and even the natural society which God has founded on law and public order, and on which she herself rests—all are leagued against her, and all are ready to shout with joy at what they deem her inevitable destruction. And



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the prayers of her children, as well as the intercessions of the saints themselves, seem for a time to be in vain, and our Lord is thought almost to have forgotten His promise, for He makes as if He were asleep—until the moment appointed in His own wisdom comes, and then He rises and rebukes the waves and the winds, and there is a great calm. This is the ever recurring experience of century after century. It happened at the beginning of this century, and in the closing years of the last. It has happened in our own time, and even now the Pontiff, on the throne of St. Peter, is fain to warn the faithful again and again, of the urgent danger of the time and of the necessity for most instant and united prayer. No doubt the day will come when the storm will for the time be lulled and the madness of the waves cease. And as often as this happens in succeeding centuries of the life of the Church, as often are her children reminded of this scene on the Lake of Galilee, when our Lord seemed to have forgotten His charge while He was asleep on a pillow, in the moment of the most urgent danger, and when, at His own chosen moment, He bade the waves and the winds be still.

## CHAPTER XX.

### *The Legion of Devils.*

St. Matt. viii. 28—34; St. Mark v. 1—21; St. Luke viii. 26—40.  
*Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 64.

It has often happened, in the lives of missionary saints and other Apostolic men, that the vessels in which they have sailed from place to place have been met by very violent tempests, and been saved almost miraculously from destruction. And in such cases the saints have seen the work of the evil spirits in the tempests, which have been raised to hinder their carrying the Gospel, or the means of grace, to some country that might otherwise remain without them, as well as the interference of heaven in their safety under such imminent danger, and in the calming of the stormy seas which has suddenly taken place. Such incidents have their anticipation in the Life of our Lord, and the stilling of the storm of which we had to speak in the last chapter, is their typical forecast. It might almost seem as if the storm on the Lake of Galilee on this occasion had been raised by the evil spirits, to hinder the approach of our Lord to a shore where He was to show, in a very marvellous manner, His power over Hell and all its citizens. When the morning dawned, and the vessel containing our Lord reached the shore opposite to Capharnaum, which led to an open gorge surrounded on each side by steep mountains, the party was at once met by two very formidable and fierce demoniacs, over whom our Lord was to exercise His



power under circumstances so singular, as to have made their dispossession the subject of a special narrative by each of the three historical Evangelists. Nowhere in the Gospel history have we so detailed an account of a case of this kind, except perhaps in those places in which they speak of the lunatic boy who was delivered from the power of the devil immediately after the Transfiguration. The history of these Gadarene or Gerasene demoniacs is full of instruction for us of every kind.

We speak of demoniacs in the plural, for St. Matthew tells us that they were two. His narrative is much the shortest of the three, and it suits his usual conciseness to speak of the demoniacs in the plural number, for it is clear that he omits a number of circumstances which apply to one only of the two, and thus his narrative does not require that he should discriminate between them. St. Mark and St. Luke add these particular circumstances, which belong to the history of the chief and most conspicuous of the two, and as these would not all apply to the second, they omit all mention of him. Thus there is no contradiction between the first Evangelist on the one hand and the second and third on the other, and the difference between the several narratives is simply accounted for by the fact that the details added by St. Mark and St. Luke belonged only to the case of one demoniac, who' seems, from the whole story, to have been a man well known, and perhaps of some importance, in the country. If this were the case, it is natural to suppose that it was his case that made so deep an impression on the inhabitants of the district, and that thus the dispossession of his companion was a matter which attracted comparatively little notice.

‘And they came on the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes, which is over against Galilee. And as He went out of the ship, and was come forth to

the land, immediately there met Him out of the sepulchres two that were possessed with devils, one, a certain man who had a devil now a very long time, and he wore no clothes, neither did he abide in a house, but in the sepulchres. And no man now could bind him, not even with chains, for having been bound often with fetters and chains, he had burst the chains and broken the fetters in pieces, and no one could tame him, and breaking the bonds he was driven by the devil into the deserts. And he was always, night and day, in the monuments, and in the mountains, crying out and cutting himself with stones, exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass by that way.'

This, then, was a case of demoniacal possession of a more fearful kind than those others which have already been mentioned in the Gospel history. In the case of the demoniac who was healed on the Sabbath on which our Lord taught in the synagogue at Capharnaum, the poor sufferer appears to have lived among his friends, and to have been allowed to be present at the services of the Sabbath, which may perhaps have ordinarily had a good soothing effect upon such persons, whose violent fits probably only recurred at intervals. In other cases we hear of demoniacs being brought to our Lord, and this shows that they must have been to a certain extent under the control of their friends. Such might be expected to be the case when possessions occurred in the midst of the chosen people, when the Synagogue, the Church of that time, was in its full ordinary power, and when the cities and dwellings of the people were to some extent sanctified by the holy prayers and ordinances of the true religion. The country of the Gerasenes appears to have been either altogether heathen, or inhabited by a mixed population of which a large portion were heathen. In such regions the evil spirits would have more power,



as in our own day they have more power in heretical countries than in Catholic countries, more in heathen lands than in Christian countries. Certainly, the incidents of the case now related by the Evangelists are in complete accord with this experience. As these two demoniacs seem to have run to meet our Lord and His companions, they may not have known Who He was until they came near, and their rushing upon the party may be explained by what the Evangelist tells us, that no man could pass that way, and they may have at first intended to fall on the wayfarers with their usual violence. But the evil spirits soon became aware, if they had not discerned our Lord from the beginning, of the presence of One Who was their Master, and from Whose anger and justice they had everything to fear. And it is possible that the Evangelists mean us to understand that they knew our Lord at once, and that their meeting him in the manner they did was the result of their abject terror at finding themselves in His Presence.

St. Mark and St. Luke tell us that the demoniac threw himself at our Lord's feet, and that the Lord addressed the devil who had possession of the chief of these two demoniacs, saying to him, 'Go out of the man, thou unclean spirit.' 'Seeing Jesus afar off, he ran and adored Him; he fell down before Him, and crying out with a loud voice, he said, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, the Son of the Most High God? Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time? I adjure Thee by God, I beseech Thee, do not torment me! And Jesus asked him, What is thy Name? But he said, My name is Legion, for we are many, because many devils were entered into him. And they besought Him much, that He would not command them to go into the abyss, that He would not drive them away out of the country. And there was there near the mountain a great herd of swine

feeding. And the Spirits besought Him, saying, If Thou cast us out hence, send us into the herd of swine. And Jesus immediately gave them leave. And the unclean spirits going out, entered into the swine, and the herd with great violence was carried headlong down a steep place into the sea, being about two thousand, and were stifled in the sea.'

We are thus able to trace the succession of incidents in this wonderful scene. The demoniacs run to our Lord, and adore Him, the devils having discovered their Master, and crouching in abject terror at His feet. Then our Lord, as if to show His rejection of their homage, bids the devils leave the men. Then they endeavour to plead with Him in their hellish way, as if there was something unjust or premature in His purpose of depriving them of that miserable enjoyment which they find, in tormenting and afflicting the creatures of God by the usurped power which they had been allowed to exercise, as if all that was permitted them in the Providence of God was theirs by right, and as if they did not deserve immediate banishment to Hell, because God had not as yet banished them thither. 'What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, the Son of the Most High God?' and they venture to adjure Him by God not to torment them: 'Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time; I beseech Thee do not torment me.' These words will be explained more fully presently. Then, after the adjuration and petition not to be tormented, our Lord asks the name of the devil, and is answered, again, in their hellish boastful way, 'Legion, for we are many.' And while He persists in the injunction to them to go out, they pray that He will not send them out of the country, or into the abyss of Hell, which is the prison to which they are all finally destined. After this, while He still enjoins them to depart, they pray to be



allowed to go into the swine, if they are to be cast out from their human victims. Our Lord gives them leave, and in a moment the whole herd of two thousand swine is driven, by the malice of these enemies of the creatures of God, to run violently over a steep precipice into the waters of the lake below. This is the order of the several incidents here mentioned, which may have pressed so fast one on the other as to be all concluded within a few minutes.

We have already seen, in the case of the demoniac in the synagogue at Capharnaum already mentioned, as well as of those others who were delivered in the same city, after the sun had set on that memorable Sabbath, that the devils were ever forward in declaring our Lord to be the Son of God. The question whether they really discerned in Him the Divine Person Whose Name they used, or whether they uttered the words in a kind of blasphemous derision, or, again, in adulation and flattery, has been already spoken of. What is quite certain is that our Lord did not allow them to bear witness to His Divinity, nor did He allow them, on the other hand, to turn Him from His purpose of casting them out. He would have from them no witness, and He would accept from them no adoration, such as was offered to Him on this occasion. The words of the demoniac in the synagogue at Capharnaum are almost identical with those used by them in the land of the Gerasenes. In both cases it is said, 'What have we to do with Thee?' The demoniac at Capharnaum calls Him Jesus of Nazareth, perhaps with some intention of lowering Him in the minds of the audience in the synagogue. In the case of the Gerasenes the name of his supposed birthplace is left out, as in that region Capharnaum and Nazareth were equally unknown or disliked. So also the other demoniacs healed at Capharnaum had cried out that He

was the Son of God, and had been silenced by His command. And again, the demon in the synagogue is said to have asked our Lord, 'Art Thou come to destroy me?' and here the legion of devils are said in the same way to have cried out, 'Art Thou come to torment us before the time?' and to have added, first prayers and supplications, and finally, an adjuration by the name of God that He would not torment them.

The expression, 'What have we to do with Thee?' occurs in several places in Scripture, and was used by our Lord Himself in His significant answer to His Blessed Mother at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee. It has been already explained as meaning a remonstrance, an expostulation, an intimation that the person addressed either possesses, or claims, some kind of power or influence over the speaker, of which the latter has some reason to deprecate the exertion, either for the moment or altogether. The exact force or strength of the remonstrance may vary indefinitely, and is to be gathered in each case from the circumstances of the incident and the relation of the persons concerned. Thus these words may amount either to a passionate expostulation, founded on right and justice, or to a loving intimation on the part of the speaker that a certain amount of just influence is to be acknowledged. The meaning of the phrase is thus founded on the actual import of the words. In the cases before us the devils mean to claim some exemption from the power which our Lord, as they knew, could exercise over them, and which, they greatly feared, He was about to exercise actually. They lied, as they usually do, in asserting, as they virtually asserted, that our Lord had nothing to do with them, that it was just that He should let them alone. He had everything to do with them, for as God He was their natural Master and Lord, and all the power which they exerted over the



souls and bodies of men came from Him, in the first instance, as a natural gift. And in the second place, the actual exercise of this power by them, in this or that case, depended entirely on His permission and tolerance in each individual instance, and could be limited and terminated by Him at His will. Moreover, as Man He had received other powers also, by virtue of the Hypostatic Union, and He came especially for the purpose of destroying the kingdom over men which the devils had usurped, and of delivering both bodies and souls from their tyranny. They had everything to do with Him, because in the exercise of what was permitted to them, for wise and judicial purposes of the providence of God, they were fighting against His Father's honour, they were injuring His creatures, they were disturbing the peace and the beauty of His Kingdom. They had everything to do with Him, because it was His purpose, first to use them in order to chastise the sins of men and fill them with holy fear, and then to show His power and accredit His own mission in the world by casting them out by a word, and letting all men see at once the hideous malice and mischievousness of His enemies, and the healing and redeeming power and character of His own work. The devils, then, went far beyond the truth in their claim for immunity, on the ground that what they were doing was, in a certain true sense, permitted by God. It was permitted by Him, but only for His own purposes, not for theirs, and just so far and so long as seemed good to Him in His Providence.

The words which follow, 'Art thou come to destroy us, or to torment us, or to torment us before the time?'—this last clause being added on this occasion only—contain many truths concerning the condition of the fallen angels, and the manner in which they are, and are to be, treated by the justice of God. The essential

torment of the evil spirits is the loss of the possession and sight of God, and the eternal fire by which they are devoured without being destroyed. And this torment has been theirs from the moment of their fall from Heaven, greater or less in this or that one among them, in exact proportion to their sin, which was more heinous in some of them than in others. The demons of whom we hear in the Gospel history could not ask to be spared this, nor could they fear that our Lord was about to inflict it on them now, seeing that it had already been inflicted on them from the very beginning. In another sense, it might be said that His very Presence, that of the Divine Person in the Sacred Humanity, was a torment to them. It made them writhe, and renewed their pain, because it brought home to them all that they had lost, and the hopelessness of their eternal lot. The words here may be understood as including this signification, but it certainly does not represent all that they must have meant. Indeed, it is not easy for us to interpret fully the thoughts and words of these miserable enemies of God.

Besides these truths, we are taught by the Fathers, whose doctrine is based upon Scripture, that a great number of the evil spirits, probably by far the greater number, have not as yet been shut up in the prison of Hell, which is to be their abode throughout all eternity, at least not with that final and complete imprisonment which is to be their lot after the Day of Judgment, and that it is to them a comparative relief and enjoyment to be allowed to haunt the air and the earth on which we live, and to vent their malice upon the creatures of God. This final sending of them to their eternal prison is what is presently spoken of in this passage as their being cast out into the abyss, and this is the great torment and punishment which, as they know from prophecy, awaits them, and from



which they shrink with the most intense abhorrence and dread. And lastly, it is a great torture and chastisement to any evil spirit who has been permitted to possess himself of a human body, in the way and degree in which these poor demoniacs were possessed, to be cast out. Dispossession involves an act of authority on the part of God, or of some one speaking in His Name, it involves also a cessation of the usurped power in which the pride of the demons takes so much delight, and their forced submission to their Master, against Whom they have rebelled. It involves an acknowledgment of defeat, most galling to them, and it brings nearer to them, if it does not actually involve, that final incarceration of which mention has just been made. Thus the simple act of our Lord in casting them out, as He was now about to do, was in the eyes of these miserable spirits a most true torment.

We are thus able to see the meaning of this expostulation, or remonstrance, or fearful apprehension, on the part of these devils. The torment they already felt they could not deprecate, nor could they mean nothing more by their prayer than that our Lord would not come near them. They must have meant to endeavour to induce Him not to cast them out, at all events not to cast them out in such a way as to forbid them for the future from entering into other creatures of God, in such a way as to anticipate, as they would think, the final sentence of inclusion in Hell which they knew to await them hereafter, although there is not any decree or ordinance of God, much less any claim of justice on their part, which could prevent the immediate infliction on them of that final sentence at any moment in any particular case. Their first prayer would be, then, that they might not be cast out, their second prayer, if the first could not be granted, would be that they might not at once be sent to

their places of never-ending torment. This explains the meaning of the words added here, which do not occur in the former instances, 'before the time.' No sentence of God can fall before the time, for He has in His power and in His right to punish them with the extreme severity of His justice at any time. But to cast them out of the persons whom they now possessed, sooner than they might otherwise have had to leave them, would be, in their lying estimate of their rights, a tormenting them before the time, and, much more, to banish them at once to the abyss would be the same anticipation of justice.

There is yet another circumstance to be noted in connection with this particular case, which may give yet a further meaning to these words of the demons. For the country in which our Lord now found Himself seems to have been, in the main, a heathen country, the population of which was to some extent mixed, but still one of the main elements of which were heathen. Our Lord, as He said Himself, was not sent except to the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and during His lifetime He restricted His own preaching, and even that of the Apostles, to the Jewish nation. The few exceptions that we find to this rule in His conduct are only such as show us that He observed it in general with great strictness. If this was the case, the devils in the country of the Gerasenes may have alleged, in their malicious way, that the time was not yet come for Him to invade, as it were, their possessions and dominions among the heathen. Indeed, the very facts of the case show an extent of power allowed to them among these poor heathen, of which there is no instance among the dispossessions which are related elsewhere in the Gospel history. Among the Jews there are many terrible cases, but none like this. The devils seem to reign with a plenitude of power here, whereas among the Jews their



capacity for evil seems to be held in check, more or less, by the presence of the faith and the Synagogue. In this sense also, therefore, these devils may be understood as complaining that our Lord crosses over the lake to molest them, before the time has come for His teaching and authority to be spread beyond the limits of the chosen people to whom He was more immediately sent.

There may seem to be some confirmation of this interpretation in the fact, which is related by St. Mark alone, that the devils ventured even to adjure our Lord 'by God,' that He would not torment him. This was a lying and blasphemous use of the name of God on the part of these rebel spirits. But it seems to contain or imply the assertion that, as the Providence of God had arranged that these devils should be in possession of this man, or should be dominant in that region, He might be in some sort appealed to, as if His justice or His decree required that the possession and domination should not be prematurely interfered with. The other instance of this kind of adjuration in the Gospel history is that of Caiaphas the High Priest, who spoke in the name of the Synagogue, and of the nation which God had made His own, and it was therefore an act of homage to the name of His Father, for our Lord to answer the adjuration, even although it was made most malignantly, and with the sole purpose of forcing Him to an avowal which would lead at once to His condemnation as a blasphemer. It cannot certainly be said that these evil spirits had a right to interpose the authority of the name of God to shield themselves from the chastisement which was about to fall on them. But their insolence and pride were so great that they may have dared to speak as if they had some rights, in consequence of God's permission, which might be pleaded as a check to the act of authority which our Lord was now about to perform.

Notwithstanding, however, the appeals and remonstrances of these evil spirits, our Lord let them see that He would not desist from His purpose of expelling them. For 'He commanded the unclean spirit to go out of the man.' That is, He went on commanding. St. Luke and St. Mark both seem to give the command as the reason for the abject petitions of the devil, and the former, in his usual spirit of compassion and sympathy, adds here the pitiable circumstances of the case, as if to suggest that our Lord's knowledge of these circumstances was the motive of His persistence. 'For many times it seized him, and he was bound with chains, and kept in fetters, and breaking the bonds he was driven by the devil into the deserts.' St. Luke had already mentioned of this poor man the other circumstances, that he 'had a devil now a very long time, and he wore no clothes, neither did he abide in a house, but in the sepulchres.' It may be added that these two Evangelists give the story of this poor man's petition to our Lord after his deliverance, that he might remain with Him, and this seems to show that His case was one which touched and interested the Apostles very much. All the circumstances mentioned by St. Luke, point to the contrast between this case and other cases, and show that the suffering of this person was unusual in its duration, its malignity, its intensity. The devils were not usually allowed to possess their poor victims continuously, and indeed, we have seen in the instance of the demoniac healed in the Synagogue that this could not have been so.

But in the case of this man the affliction had now been for a very long time, and the fits, so to speak, of the possession were very frequent and very violent. He was treated, as was often the case when there was great violence, like a maniac, and so put into confinement by



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his friends, bound with chains and fetters, all of which in his frenzy he had strength enough, goaded on by his diabolical master, to break through. His possession seemed almost permanent, with very few intervals, nor was he permitted to rest from time to time, and live among men, but was driven by the devil into the desert, he could bear no clothes on his body, he was cutting his flesh with stones, spending his days and nights in the tombs and on the wild mountain-side, crying out, howling, and assailing all the passers-by. This was almost the extreme licence permitted by God to these evil spirits. For they were always restrained from making themselves masters of the soul and of its faculties as well as of the body, and, as has already been said, the state of possession was by no means, of necessity, a state of sin, though it was often permitted as a chastisement for sin. Our Lord, in the full knowledge of all human things which belonged to His Sacred Humanity, knew all these circumstances, and He could not forbear now, at last, to deliver him. The devils might howl out, using the voice and organs of the poor man himself, that to cast them out would be to torment them before the time. But, for the compassion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ, the time had long ago come for the deliverance of this creature of God from the miserable bondage to which these evil masters had reduced him. No amount of human suffering and degradation will ever satisfy the malice of our spiritual enemies, but in the eyes of our most loving Redeemer any suffering is enough to plead for deliverance. Indeed, when we come to consider the fruits of the voyage over the Lake taken by our Lord, we find indeed many great ends served thereby for the instruction of the Apostles, of the Gerasenes, and of ourselves, but still the one immediate result of the whole appears to have been the deliverance

of these two demoniacs, as if for them, and for them alone, our Lord had sailed through the storm.

The next incident in this history is the question asked by our Lord as to the name of the devil. 'And He asked him, What is thy name? And he saith to Him, My name is Legion, for we are many, because many devils were entered into him.' There can be no difficulty about the question here asked by our Lord. It was one of those many questions which He is related to have put, not for the sake of gaining any knowledge thereby, for He could gain by the answer none which He did not already possess, but in order that the answer might be heard by the bystanders, and that they might thus learn, not from Him, but out of the mouths of the persons addressed, what He desired them to know. The answer given by the devil, 'My name is Legion, for we are many,' was probably given in a mocking, scornful way, as if it had been said, 'Name indeed, as if we were but one: my name is Legion!' For the devils cannot lay aside their boastfulness and arrogance, even in the presence of our Lord. And, indeed, there is no difficulty at all in believing that a great number of devils might be permitted to enter into one man, as we are told that the Blessed Magdalene had once been possessed by seven devils, and as our Lord, in the description of the returning devil, had spoken of him as taking with him seven others more wicked than himself. Still it is probable that the name Legion, if it was meant to convey, as some have thought, the exact number of the evil spirits in this case, was a great exaggeration. It is better to take it as simply signifying a large number, and by this those present at the dispossession would understand the extreme affliction and misery to which this poor man had been subjected, and might also be reminded of the immense multitude of our spiritual enemies, who sur-



round us on every side, and whose malice is in proportion to their numbers, ever ready to wreak their hatred and envy upon us to any extent that is permitted to them by God. And yet, after all, they could not make even this victim whom they possessed sin unless he consented to their temptations, nor could they hurt him, even in his body, one atom more than was allowed them. When they left him, as we shall see, he was in a state at once to resume the demeanour and habits of civilised men, though we see, from their action on the herd of swine, how ready they would have been to urge him to self-destruction if they could.

After declaring their number, the devils, as we are told by St. Mark and St. Luke, made two petitions to our Lord, one that they might not be driven out of the country, and another that He would not command them to go into the abyss of Hell. This last, would have been, as we have already seen, to put an end, either for ever, or for a time, to their power of injuring and tempting mankind, and the other punishment which they deprecated would have been to drive them into some other part of the world, instead of this country of the Gerasenes where they had made themselves so formidable and so mischievous. No doubt the devils rejoice at any fresh opportunity of deluding and hurting men, but perhaps they prefer the places and the populations in which they have already acquired power, because, under such circumstances, they are able to lead men on and on to greater sins, or to inflict on them greater and greater injuries as chastisements for their sins. And if they made their prayer with some hellish intentions and motives such as these, our Lord allowed their desires to be articulated by the organs of the demoniacs, from whom they were about to be cast out, as He had permitted them in the same way to declare their

multitude, in order that the Apostles and any others who were present might hear them, and so gain fresh knowledge both of His power over the kingdom of Satan and of the malice of these enemies of God and man. For it is from such anecdotes as that of which we are speaking that we gain our knowledge concerning the action of the demons in the world in which we live, and the extent to which liberty is allowed to them by God.

It does not appear that our Lord gave any direct answer to these two appeals. Then, as it seems, the devils, still in abject terror lest their fears should be verified, made another petition, which involved their own humiliation, but which still, if granted, would save them from the extreme chastisement which they apprehended. There was not far from the spot a herd of many swine, feeding, on the mountain. It was something very ignominious to these haughty spirits, the highest in rank and the noblest in gifts of all the creatures of God, to be told that they might possess themselves of some of the most unclean and vile of the animal creation. When the devils enter men, they at least have to do with beings who are spiritual like themselves, but swine are among the lowest orders of the kingdom to which they belong, and were considered so foul that they were neither allowed as sacrifice nor even as food for the chosen people. And yet there was something about them which had a miserable attraction, in its way, to those evil spirits, for they were at least animals, the property of man, and therefore by destroying them they could injure man, whom they hate most of all God's creatures, because he is destined to sit in their lost thrones in Heaven, and because he has been favoured by God in a peculiar way, inasmuch as God has chosen to become man. And we find in the history of Job that Satan began by attacking



that holy patriarch in his possessions of this kind, and these devils were glad to vent their hatred on the men of this country, from which they feared that our Lord might chase them, by the destruction of this large herd of swine, since no other way was open to them.

‘And the devils besought Him, saying, If Thou cast us out hence, send us into the herd of swine. And He said to them, Go.’ This request is explained by St. Luke, ‘They besought Him that He would suffer them to enter into the swine.’ For our Lord did not directly wish the possession of the swine, or their subsequent destruction, but He permitted it on the suggestion and request of the evil spirits, using for the purposes of His own wisdom and mercy what they proposed out of malice and hatred to men. So it is with all the mischievous plans of His enemies, whether devils or men. He permits them, and turns them all, in His own Providence, to a good end, either of chastisement, or warning, or instruction. ‘And the unclean spirits going out, entered into the swine, and the herd with great violence was carried headlong into the sea, being about two thousand, and were stifled in the sea.’ Such is the malignity of the hatred of the evil spirits against God’s creatures, especially man and what belongs to man. If they were permitted to injure us to the full extent of their power, they would at once destroy the whole world, and their opportunities of mischief, which are now and then allowed them in the Providence of God, are meant by Him to instruct us in this truth, how extreme is their hatred, how great is their power, and how entirely, in the exercise of their power for the satisfaction of their hatred, they are reined in or let loose by God. The destruction of the swine followed immediately on the relinquishment by the devils of their possession of the demoniacs, and on our Lord’s permission to them to enter into their new victims, in order,

as it seems, that no mistake might be possible as to the agencies at work in their destruction.

The devils may have had more than one evil intention in this catastrophe. They may have simply indulged their hatred for men by destroying the swine which belonged to men, and this intention is sufficient to account for their action without more. But it may also have been in their designs to put an impediment in the way of the conversion of the people of the country, which might possibly have resulted from our Lord's display of Divine power in the deliverance of the demoniacs. That is, they may have wished that our Lord should appear, in the eyes of the ignorant population, not only as One Who had the power to cast out even the fiercest and most violent demons, but also as One Whose presence among them was heralded by the loss of valuable property in the destruction of the herd of swine. It may not have been in our Lord's designs to preach on the present occasion to these benighted people, and if, as has been supposed, they were mainly a heathen population, it would have been beyond the range of His special mission so to do. We find Him after this passing through other parts in which there could have been few Jews, and He does this, as it appears, chiefly for the purpose of avoiding the attention of His malignant enemies and persecutors in Galilee, and not with any view of actually converting the heathen. Whatever was the end which the devils had in view, He did not see fit to forbid them the use of their natural power in the destruction of the herd of swine.

There have been instances in the history of the Church in which the Providence of God has permitted similar losses, even when it might have seemed that to prevent them would greatly have forwarded the interests of religion. Thus the child which St. Clotilde had per-



suaded Clovis to allow her to have baptised, died soon after baptism, and its death was immediately attributed to his concession. It has often happened that an epidemic malady has broken out in a savage tribe, soon after it has consented to receive Christian instruction. And in Christian countries, just as the Church has seemed to be about to triumph, her success has been frustrated by the sudden death of some of her most conspicuous supporters, as when, in our own country, Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole both died on the same day, leaving the throne open to Elizabeth and the see of Canterbury to Parker. It is, in the same way, the private experience of hundreds of converts, that everything seems to succeed with them until they submit to the Church, and everything to go wrong with them afterwards. In many cases it is easy to see that the Providence of God is, in this respect, rich in mercy towards such persons, giving them opportunities of laying up immense merits, or punishing them temporally for sins, as soon as they are able to make their punishment turn to their spiritual profit. In other cases the counsels of God are hidden from our eyes, for they belong to a great plan of which we can only see a small part. But our faith is enough to tell us that all is ordered by Him most mercifully and most wisely.

Our Lord may have had many reasons for this permission of destruction. Some of the writers of the Church have thought, as has already been said, that He intended it as a lesson of the malice and power of the evil spirits, our enemies, and of the extent to which they are under the control of God. Others have thought that the destruction of the swine was permitted by Him, because these animals were unclean, and because it was forbidden, in the Mosaic Law, to eat of their flesh. This explanation, however, supposes that the owners of

the swine were Jews, who were led by the hope of gain to furnish these animals to their heathen neighbours. It is not impossible, however, that, even if the owners and keepers were heathens, our Lord may have granted the permission to the devils, with a view of showing that He would not protect what was to a certain extent proscribed and branded as unclean by the Law. Thus He permits many accidents and misfortunes in heathen lands, and to those outside the pale of the Church, from which her children are shielded, and which are not allowed within the range of her influence. Moreover, it may have been in the plan by which all His movements and actions were guided, that He should on some few occasions show that He was most truly Master and Lord of all the world, and that, as such, He had the right and the power to take any creatures whatever or any possessions whatever for His own use, and to deal with them as He pleased, without regard to the inferior rights of human owners, so entirely shadowy and subordinate in comparison with His own supreme and universal dominion.

We can easily understand that the lesson of His life to us would be incomplete if there were not also in it some pages from which truths of this class are to be gathered. Thus we have the example of the cursing of the unfruitful fig-tree, which probably had an owner, whose rights may have been injured by our Lord's parabolic and prophetic act regarding it. In the same way, when He needed the ass and her colt for the purpose of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He bade the disciples tell the owners, 'The Lord hath need of them,' and said they would send them at once. These were instances of His use of creatures over which this or that man may have had certain rights of ownership, which, however, were nothing in comparison with the



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dominion of our Lord. In the present case, if He chose to use the swine feeding on the mountain for the purpose of illustrating the truths to which He desired to draw attention, the very secondary rights of their owners must give way. For all creatures belonged to Him, by right of creation and preservation, and they could be of no use to their so-called owners except by His cooperation and sustentation of their lives. And as the Incarnate Son of God, He was Lord and King of all the world into which He had come, and He was but exercising His inherent and sovereign rights in permitting the destruction of the swine, giving to their owners, as it may be said, a compensation that far outweighed their loss, in His own Presence among them, in the marvelous exercise of His power in the deliverance of the demoniacs, and in the truths which He proclaimed both by what He did and by what He permitted.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *The Gerasenes.*

St. Matt. viii. 30—34 ; St. Mark v. 14—21 ; St. Luke viii. 34—40  
*Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 64.

THE marvels which had taken place after the landing of our Lord and His disciples on the shore of the lake opposite to Capharnaum, were to have a sequel of which we might hardly have expected to read, but that the history of God's dealings with men are full of such incidents. What might have passed if our Lord had acted with more severity towards the legion of devils cannot be conjectured, but the destruction of the large herd of swine, which He had permitted, could not fail to attract attention and to cause alarm. The population, which might have passed over almost without remark the wonderful deliverance of the demoniacs, especially of that one whose case was the most lamentable, as well as the best known, on account of the great length of time during which he had been possessed by the devils, could not but be aroused by the loss of the unclean animals, to which they looked as the sources of gain. 'Which when they that kept them saw done, they fled, and told it in the city and in the villages and in the fields, they told everything, and concerning them that had been possessed by the devils.' They put the loss of the swine first, as touching themselves most nearly, for they were responsible to the owners, and perhaps they might have passed over the deliverance of the



demoniacs, but that it was necessary to mention it in order to explain the strange calamity which had befallen their charge in a way that threw no discredit on themselves.

The tidings spread through the whole region. We may suppose that Gerasa was a town of some size, with a number of farms and clusters of outlying dwellings in its neighbourhood. The owners of the swine seem to have been many, and the simple fact that one after another had to be informed by the keepers of the herd was enough to spread the news of the arrival of our Lord among the whole population of the gorge in which the town lay. Thus, in one house after another, the name of our Lord came to be spoken of, and it is natural to suppose that these poor people had already heard of Him, though He may never before have set foot in their country. The Providence of God used the destruction of the swine for the purpose of spreading the tidings as swiftly as possible through the population, and, as has already been remarked, the perishing of the herd could not be made known without some mention of what had been done for the famous demoniacs who haunted the sepulchres between the town and the strand. 'And they went out to see what was done. And they came to Jesus, and found the man out of whom the devils were departed sitting at His feet, clothed, and in his right mind. And they were afraid. And they that had seen it, told them in what manner he had been dealt with who had the devil, and concerning the swine. And all the multitude of the country of the Gerasenes besought Him to depart from their coasts, for they were taken with great fear.'

We find more than one opinion among the Fathers as to the nature and motives of this great fear of which the Evangelists speak, and which made the Gerasenes

beseech our Lord to depart from them. It has been thought that this fear was that reverential and humble awe of which we have an example in St. Peter, after the miraculous fishing which took place soon after the delivery by our Lord of the Sermon on the Mount, when the Apostle begged our Lord to depart from him, for he was a sinful man. That is, he was astonished and appalled at the great display of our Lord's power which he had just witnessed, and by which he and his partners profited so much. He felt himself unworthy to be the recipient of boons so great, the witness of wonders so surpassing, and, above all, of being the companion or even the host of so Divine a Guest. The Apostle's words were words of loving and adoring humility, and our Lord understood them as such, and by no means fulfilled his request to the letter. That He did not act so on the occasion of which we are speaking, is perhaps enough to show us that the words of the Gerasenes were the product of feelings very different from those of St. Peter. Others of the Fathers suppose, therefore, that the fear which came upon them was a worldly fear of self-interest, natural perhaps in persons who may have felt themselves as sinful as St. Peter proclaimed himself to be. They feared that He might go on to mark His presence among them by other chastisements and plagues, and so they besought Him, for they did not dare to threaten Him or to attempt to force Him, to depart and leave them to themselves. And our most gracious Lord would not force Himself on them, and so let them constrain Him, in their unworthiness, to leave them in their spiritual blindness and unconscious misery. The opinion of these writers, then, attributes the fear of the Gerasenes mainly to their love of temporal things, as if they might have been ready to welcome our Lord if He had not per-



mitted the legion of devils to enter into the herd of swine and to destroy them, and they consider that these poor pagans, as they appear to have been, preferred temporal possessions to the knowledge of the truth, immunity from material disaster to the spiritual treasures of the Gospel.

It seems, however, not quite necessary to put the petition of the Gerasenes upon a sordid anxiety for the safety of their temporal possessions. The Evangelists speak of their great fear as the cause of their prayer to our Lord, just as our Lord's words to St. Peter, on the occasion already referred to, 'Fear not!' seem to imply that fear had a great part in the feelings which had made the Apostle cry out, 'Depart from me, O Lord.' For the near approach of anything that belongs to the supernatural world, such as the power which is exercised in a miracle, or, again, a great manifestation of holiness and spiritual purity, or the appearance of an angel, or a vision, or anything else of that kind, strikes the natural man with fear, and this feeling is not destroyed even in the saints of God while on earth. Thus we find it more than once mentioned that 'fear came on' the people after a great miracle. Man, at all events fallen man, is afraid of his God. This natural shrinking away from the face of what is Divine, of anything that seems to bring God nearer to us, may account for the fear which came upon the Gerasenes, all the more as the manifestation of power on the part of our Lord had taken the form of the casting out of a great number of devils, instead of an ordinary miracle of healing mercy, and of the permission of a conspicuous display of the malice and power of the evil spirits, in the very presence of Him Who had shown so marvellous an authority over themselves. It cannot be doubted that the sense of the terrific power displayed in this incident was height-

ened to the Gerasenes by the destruction of their own property. Moreover, it must be remembered again that they were probably a heathen population, among whom the devil had a greater power than among the Jews, and where ideas of the Godhead were very dark and gloomy. For this was a part of the diabolical ingenuity of the enemies of God and man in heathenism, to represent all that was Divine as severe, capricious, easily moved to anger, pitiless, inexorable, morose, revengeful, far more prone to inflict injuries and to let loose calamities on mankind than to show them any compassion or mercy. The heathen instinct is to serve God or the gods as hard masters, of whom they would gladly be rid if they could, but whom they must at any cost beware of offending. In truth, these poor Gerasenes, respectfully and reverently beseeching our Lord to leave them to themselves, are almost typical representatives of the heathen temper towards God, a temper which may often be found even among those who call themselves Christians.

In contrast to the superstitious desire of the Gerasenes to be rid of our Lord, is the figure of the late victim of demoniacal fury, the man out of whom the legion of devils had been cast, sitting at the feet of our Lord, clothed, and in his right mind. The description given of him by the Evangelists, reads as if they had heard the people who witnessed the incident speaking of him, and it is clear that his case was very well known throughout the country, as of one who had been for a very long time in the miserable state out of which our Lord rescued him. The conjecture that he was a man of importance and of some position seems very probable in itself. As he had been for so long possessed, and driven away by the devils from all communication with his relations and friends, it is not at all unlikely that he would be an



object of fear and of some suspicion at first, and this may have been partly the reason why our Lord allowed him to sit at His own feet and be seen by the whole multitude. Perhaps he was also afraid to go among them again immediately. But the main reason for his humble petition to our Lord must have been his deep gratitude, and a fear of the recurrence of the fearful calamity from which he had just escaped. Our Lord at once acceded to the prayer of the population, and prepared to depart. They gave Him no thanks, they offered Him no hospitality, though He had but just landed from the night voyage through the tempest, they urged Him only to depart. 'And He, going up into the ship, returned back again. And when He was going up into the ship, he that had been troubled with the devil began to beseech Him that he might be with Him. And He admitted him not, but saith to him, Go into thy house and to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had mercy on thee. And he went his way, and began to publish through the whole city and in Decapolis, how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men wondered.' The name Decapolis applies to a region, not to a single city, and St. Mark, who inserts it here, is our authority, at a point of the history a little later on, for another miracle of our Lord's wrought in 'the coasts of Decapolis.'

We have not far to seek for the motive which may have guided our Lord in so easily allowing Himself to be hindered from any further preaching among the Gerasenes. Indeed it is not at all certain that He had any further design in landing on that coast than the withdrawal of Himself from the attention and persecution of His enemies in and about Capharnaum on the one hand, and the merciful purpose of delivering these two demoniacs on the other. He may certainly have

wished to do something towards preparing the population on that further side of the Lake for the reception of the Gospel at some future time, and for this He had already provided and was about still further to provide. But at this time of His Ministry it was becoming usual with Him to pass from place to place without formal or public preaching. But it has already been said more than once that this population was mainly heathen, and to such He was not directly sent. If they had pressed Him to remain among them, as the Samaritans of Sychar had pressed Him, it is natural to suppose that He would have yielded gladly and lovingly, but He had no reason at all for forcing Himself on them. And, as He was at the time particularly engaged in the instruction and the training of the Apostles in the methods and principles of the missionary life on which they were so soon to enter, it was a part of the lesson which they were to learn from His example, as well as from His precept, not to force the Gospel upon unwilling hearers. The Gospel addresses itself to the heart, and is to win its way with men of good will. It is, therefore, contrary to the whole genius, so to say, of the Gospel, to present it to those whose hearts are evidently shut against it, and will be shut only the more closely the more it is urged upon them against their will. There is another reason for the same line of conduct, contained in the charge to the Apostles by our Lord on which we shall very soon have to comment. This other reason consists in the shortness of time, the value of the labour of the Apostolate, on account of which it is necessary that the gracious offer of God should be at once made to new hearers, rather than that time should be consumed in again and again endeavouring to overcome the obstinacy of those who turn away from them. Our Lord tells the Apostles that they will not have gone through the cities of Israel



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before the Son of Man come. They are to shake the dust of the cities which reject them off their feet, and go their way to other scenes of labour. Our Lord was virtually acting on this rule when He at once embarked on His ship to sail away from the land of the Gerasenes.

For good reasons of His own Wisdom, our Lord did not allow the man who had been delivered from the devil to join His own company. It was an act of gratitude on the part of that poor sufferer, and also, probably, an effect of the fear he might have that he could not be safe at a distance from his benefactor. But our Lord could not have allowed his Apostles and immediate companions to be burthened with the charge of persons thus healed, nor, in the great majority of cases, could these last have been fit for the strict rule of life and the many privations of the Apostolic company. It was better, and more in accordance with the designs of God in the marvellous work which had just been wrought, that such persons should go back to their homes and their ordinary duties, and become living and speaking witnesses of the immense mercy of God and of the power of the Sacred Humanity of our Lord. In this way the testimony of the miracles was spread abroad and perpetuated, instead of being confined to those only who might happen to have been present when the miraculous cures or deliverances were wrought. Every one who saw and heard of this man throughout the whole region could thus learn from him something concerning our Lord. In giving him this mission, our Lord virtually promised him the protection and security from relapse about which he was so anxious. ‘Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thy house, and tell how great things God hath done for thee. And he went through the whole city, publishing how great things Jesus had done

for him, and all men wondered.' And St. Mark, as has been said, adds that he published our Lord's mercies in the whole region of Decapolis.

It is also easy to connect the lesson conveyed by the case of this man, and by our Lord's dealings with him, with those other cases of which mention was made as occurring before the voyage across the Lake. In those cases our Lord put the difficulties of the Apostolical vocation very plainly, and also spoke very strongly about the danger of tampering with such vocations. In this case, He decidedly rejects the offer made by this poor man in the first fervour of his gratitude. For, as there are many who may seek some high vocation without sufficient reflection and with a certain amount of lurking ambition or self-interest, so there are those who are but too ready to listen to specious pretexts for adjourning or infringing on their perfect obedience to a Divine call. And the case before us shows us another truth. There are many who may aspire to such paths of life who are not fit for them. Their desires and their aspirations do them good, as long as they do not make them indifferent to the duties of their true vocations. Some also are allowed by Providence to make trial of a religious life, though they are not intended to persevere in it. There is no need to suppose that all who make the trial are really called, or that all who do not persevere forsake, rather than mistake, their vocation. They are in many cases better fitted for other duties, by having had the experience and the training which they had gained, where they have yet not remained. They are far better than they would otherwise have been, they have less worldliness, more strength and practical light to guide them and to sustain them under trials and temptations. They do much good to others in their own homes, as this poor man may have done among his neighbours and



friends, by making known the name and the power of our Lord.

Thus the Gerasenes and their neighbours, who were for the present unfit for the preaching of the Gospel among them by our Lord and His Apostles, were provided with an instruction according to their capacity, and so not left altogether without benefit from the great work of mercy and power which had been wrought among them. Our Lord, Who might have done more for them at once if their faith had been stronger, did what He could, according to their weakness, and prepared the way for greater things hereafter. For it is only reasonable to suppose that, in these seemingly chance incidents, which make up altogether so large a portion of His Public Life, when He passed from place to place, in consequence of some persecution in one place or some rejection of His teaching in another, were all arranged divinely in His Providence, with a view to the benefit of those among whom He appeared and went away, as well as with regard to the actual emergencies of the time, and His prudential consideration for the safety of His own Person until the time came for His Passion, the edification and instruction of His immediate companions, and the general requirements of the work which He had in hand. There is the same appearance of occasional influences being allowed to regulate the course of Apostles and Apostolical men, as in the journeys and voyages of St. Paul, or the sojourning in this or that particular spot of men like St. Vincent Ferrer or St. Francis Xavier. Our Lord had done on that further side of the Lake exactly what He designed to do, and He provided, in the most perfect manner then possible, both for the demoniac himself and for the population among whom he was commissioned to make known the mercies of God vouchsafed to himself. And

now, though He had spent so few hours, probably, in this pagan or semi-pagan country, the work of His Father called Him again to the city which had come to be spoken of as His own, where more than one case of urgent need was awaiting His charity. ‘And entering into a boat, He passed over the water, and came into His own city. And the multitude received Him, for they were all waiting for Him.’ The width of the Lake of Galilee is nowhere so great but that the opposite shores can easily be seen, and the boat in which He was would be recognized as it approached the city.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### *The Disciples of St. John.*

St. Matt. ix. 14—17 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 65.

WE have already noticed many indications, in the narratives of the Evangelists at this period, that the presence of our Lord in or near Capharnaum, was now comparatively rare, and that, in consequence, the people took every opportunity of collecting about Him, whenever it was possible for them so to do. The sail across the Lake, of which we have lately been speaking, was sudden and unexpected, and they seem to have understood that it was only the occasion of a short absence of our Lord. The circumstances of the application made to Him for admission to His company, and the like, of which we hear just before the departure of our Lord, seem to show that it was necessary to lay hold of every occasion for the sake of obtaining access to Him at this time. The conversation of which we are now to speak is an



evidence of the same fact. St. Mark and St. Luke tell us that the people were expecting Him on the shore on His return, and that when He landed they collected in numbers around Him. And it is here that a few words of St. Matthew lead us to place an incident which shows that there were in the crowd some of the disciples of St. John, who obtained the first place, so to say, among those who were so anxious to apply to Him.

Here again we meet with one of those occasions on which it is very necessary to remember the principles on which the Harmony of the Gospels must be formed, if we are not to run the risk of seeming to make the Evangelists contradict each other, not indeed as to the more important portions of their narratives, but as to circumstances of time and order concerning which they are, in truth, most careful and most accurate. In mentioning the various applications made to our Lord concerning admission to His company, and the like, as also in the case of certain common classes of miracles, such as those of the dispossession of demoniacs, which occasioned the calumnies and blasphemies of the Pharisees, and a few other classes of incidents, it is quite clear that the Evangelists must have had a large number of incidents in their memories, which were more or less identical in character. They are incidents which must have occurred, as it seems, scores of times in the course of our Lord's active life of preaching. It would therefore be most foolish to suppose that, whenever we find mention of something belonging to these classes in the various Gospels, the Evangelists are to be necessarily understood as recording exactly the same identical incidents. And it would be still more uncritical to find a difficulty in the fact that these incidents seem to be placed in different surroundings by the various Evangelists who relate them, and that we must, in consequence

of this entirely fictitious difficulty, do serious violence to the Sacred Text in one way or in the other. It is usually the case that the Evangelists have tacitly furnished us with the solution of all such difficulties, if we will but attend to them, and it is always true that these difficulties vanish, when they are considered in the light of an intelligent study of the order and character and particular aim and arrangement of each several Gospel.

The difficulty which has been raised as to the order of events at the point which we have now reached, is one of these imaginary wants of accuracy on the part of the historians of our Lord, who, even if they had not been inspired and guided by the Holy Ghost, would still, on account of their human knowledge and their immense reverence for everything connected with their work and with the Person of our Lord, have been sure to deserve our most absolute confidence on all these matters. The single difficulty in this place lies in the fact that the incident of which we have now to speak relates to one of the commonest questions of the time, a question which must have naturally occurred to any one who watched attentively, whether as a friend or as an enemy, the gradual growth of our Lord's work, and the principles on which He conducted its development. This being the case, we have already had to record an incident which in almost every particular resembles this of which we are now to speak, but which is placed by the two Evangelists, St. Mark and St. Luke, at an earlier point of the history. At that point it was almost inevitable that the question should have been raised, because it was just after the great banquet given to our Lord by the Evangelist St. Matthew on the occasion of his own call to the more familiar companionship with his Master. The manner in which St. Matthew relates the conversation of which we are now speaking, is quite in accordance



with the principles which he continually follows in the composition of his work. For he brings in this conversation as a sequel to the mention of the kindred subject of the question raised as to our Lord's habit of eating and drinking occasionally with publicans and sinners, as His enemies put it. This occurs immediately after the banquet given by St. Matthew himself. This, of course, was at an earlier period. And there seems no doubt, from the accounts of the other Evangelists, that a question about the absence of any rule with regard to general fasts among His followers, was actually put to our Lord at the same time with the other. It is very natural that one question should lead on to the other in the same conversation. But this same question, about the difference between our Lord's rule and those of St. John and of the Pharisees in this respect, was also asked, and by other inquirers, at the time of which we are now speaking, for St. Matthew has taken the pains to tell us that this occasion was connected with the appeal made to our Lord, by Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, to come and heal his daughter. The words in which St. Matthew tells us this, seem to have been purposely inserted to guide us as to the context. We know that the miracle on the daughter of Jairus took place on the return of our Lord from the other side of the Lake, after the dispossession of the legion of devils. It is therefore necessary to place this incident at this point of the story. And, indeed, St. Matthew's words guide us to this arrangement, as has been said.

It is well known, and frequently mentioned in the Gospel history, that our Lord did not begin by training His disciples as a body according to any fixed external rule, especially with regard to bodily austerities and the practice of mortifications of that kind. He laid down the principles of Evangelical perfection with regard to

fasting, as with regard to prayer and to almsdeeds, in the Sermon on the Mount, and the large portion of that discourse which is devoted to these subjects is abundant evidence of their importance in the system of our Lord. It would have been absurd to give precepts as to the manner in which Christians were to fast, and give alms, and pray, unless they were to fast, and to give alms, and to pray. But the Church was not yet founded, and her beautiful order of seasons and days of public and common penance was not yet promulgated, and so the incipient community, so to call it, of our Lord's disciples, had no fixed or known rules on this subject. It cannot be for a moment doubted that fasting was very largely and severely practised by the disciples, but all was done in the spirit of the precept which bade them hide such observances from the eyes of men. Thus, whereas it could be said that on such and such days and occasions the disciples of the Pharisees or the disciples of the Baptist would fast, this could not be said in the same way of the disciples of our Lord. There was an entire absence of any public customs or prescriptions of this kind, and thus it appeared outwardly that our Lord's disciples did not observe such common mortifications.

This circumstance in our Lord's method with His disciples could not escape remark, all the more on account of the contrast in which He thus placed Himself to the other teachers of the day, especially the Pharisees and St. John Baptist himself, who, in this particular, adhered to the usual custom of the Jewish teachers. St. John founded no school, no system of his own. His work was essentially the work of one who prepares the way for another. Thus there was no reason at all why he should not do as other teachers of the day in this respect. It did not need any great amount of captiousness to make the remark on the difference



between our Lord's system and that of others, especially in such a matter as that of fasting. It must necessarily have happened frequently, even in the short period of time during which our Lord had preached in Galilee, that a day or a season would arrive which the disciples of the Pharisees or of St. John would observe by fasting, and which was not so observed by our Lord and His disciples, at least as far as any visible mortification went. There are some Catholic countries in which the abstinence of the Saturday in each week, in honour of our Blessed Lady, has been dispensed with by authority, and others in which it is still observed. Thus it is natural for travellers from the former countries, when they find themselves in the latter, to ask questions as to the reason for the difference. So the members of certain religious orders observe rules of this kind which are not observed by others, or by Christians in general, and here again the difference meets the eye, and is quite certain to be noticed. In the same way, it seems to have been one of the commonest remarks made in Galilee, at this time, upon the 'practice' of our Lord's disciples, that they did not fast when others did. We have mentioned an instance of this in the question put to our Lord on the subject, which is related by the second and third Evangelists after their account of the banquet given by St. Matthew soon after his call to the Apostolate. It is in its place there, and it is clear that the answer then made by our Lord to that question furnishes the main reason why the question itself has been so recorded. But exactly the same reason may be assigned for the insertion in those two Gospels of the incident related at the same time, of the question put to our Lord—it is not said by whom—as to the fasting of the disciples of St. John, and of the answer given by Him.

Although it is not said in that place, either by St. Mark or by St. Luke, who the persons were who asked our Lord the question as to which we are speaking, it seems most likely that that question was put by some persons of the same class who had asked the other question about His eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. For in that question the disciples of St. John and of the Pharisees are spoken of in the third person : ‘Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees in like manner, but Thy disciples do not fast? Thine eat and drink.’ Nor is there anything in the context to show that the disciples of the Baptist had any more to do with the question than the Apostles themselves. But it is most likely that the disciples of St. John would be as much inclined to ask the question as any others, when they had an opportunity. It is likely that they would need as much as any others some instruction on the point, whenever it came to be brought before them, and especially when the time came for them to think that they might have to pass from the school, so to say, of their own master, to that of our Lord. They would then find themselves, to recur to the illustration lately used, in the position of persons who find themselves entering a country, in which the common practice, as to the ordinance of fasting or abstinence, was different from that to which they had been accustomed in their own homes. There is great reason for thinking that such was their position at this point of the history.

The last thing that we heard of the Blessed Baptist was that solemn embassy, so to call it, which he had sent of two of his disciples to our Lord, who were commissioned to ask Him in plain terms, ‘Art Thou He that art to come, or do we look for another?’ And we have seen what was his meaning and intention in that



question, how our Lord answered it, and how He took that opportunity of uttering His magnificent encomium on St. John himself. There can be little doubt that the intention of St. John was to put his own disciples formally in communication with our Lord, and to give them an opportunity of witnessing some of the miracles of mercy by which His Mission was attested, a kind of evidence which, in his own case, had been entirely wanting. St. John must have done this, as looking forward to the time when they would become the disciples of our Lord, and perhaps he had already some kind either of foreknowledge or of anticipation, of his own removal from the scene. Even humanly speaking, a life that was entirely at the mercy of a cruel and luxurious tyrant whom he had upbraided for his sin, and by whose side sat the incestuous partner of his crime, burning with hatred against the prophet who had exercised so much influence over him, could not be very secure, and it is possible that St. John may have been forewarned of his approaching end, as has been the case with many of the saints of the Church. He could hardly be ignorant of the shortness of the time allotted by Providence for the whole personal work of our Lord, nor of the sacrifice which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem, nor of the threatening tone which had lately been adopted by His malignant and very powerful enemies. And the issue of the mission of his disciples, when they returned to him after having seen our Lord work a great number of miracles, must certainly have been that he had greater opportunities, of which he could at once avail himself, of showing how the prophecies were fulfilled in our Lord, and thus adding another link to the chain of evidences which were to lead them to Him. It would, therefore, be quite what we should expect that, at the point of time which has

now been reached, when the first series of parables was delivered, many of the disciples of St. John were presenting themselves to our Lord in order to place themselves under His guidance.

This would only be natural, even if there were no other reason for their coming to our Lord than the witness so constantly borne to Him by their own master. But, in truth, it seems very probable indeed that, at the time of which we are now speaking, the little band of followers who had remained in faithful attendance on St. John in his prison, had just been broken up by the violent death of that great Saint. The murder of St. John is not related at this point of the history by the Evangelists, but there is good reason for thinking that it had just taken place. They relate it in connection with incidents which must have occurred some time later, when the preaching of the Apostles had attracted the attention of Herod to our Lord Himself, and when, as they tell us, that wicked and superstitious King began to question whether John, whom he had beheaded, were not risen from the dead. The Evangelists always make our Lord the principal figure in their narratives, and do not leave what relates to Him in order to speak of others. Thus it is that even so striking a fact as the murder of St. John, with all its incidents, is not placed by them at its proper chronological point in the history, but is only brought in as it were occasionally, to illustrate the remark made by Herod about our Lord. It is certain, therefore, that St. John was beheaded some time before the preaching of the Apostles, a point in the Ministry of our Lord at which we shall very soon find ourselves. And if this be so, it is very probable that that murder had already taken place at this time, when our Lord returned from the land of the Gerasenes to Capharnaum across the Lake of Galilee. Thus the disciples of



St. John, who now presented themselves, would be men who were about to pass under our Lord's immediate teaching, after having been trained in the school of St. John.

‘Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Thy disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, Can the children of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the day will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast. And nobody putteth a piece of raw cloth unto an old garment. For it taketh away the fulness thereof from the garment, and there is made a greater rent. Neither do they put new wine into old bottles. Otherwise the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish. But new wine they put into new bottles, and both are preserved.’

This answer of our Lord is the same in substance, and nearly the same in words, with the answer which He gave on the former occasion, to which reference has been made. One clause of the former answer, as recorded by St. Luke, is omitted here, but the remainder is identical in the two cases. It is strange that it should appear necessary to explain that this furnishes no argument at all for confounding the two separate occasions, and making them one. Our Lord did not use words at random, nor could He change His mind as to the reason of a line of action deliberately adopted by Him from the beginning. His only reason for varying His words would lie in the various characters or conditions of mind among those to whom He spoke on different occasions. In the present case there is no such variety as to cause Him to alter His language. The inquirers on both occasions asked a perfectly legitimate and natural question, and asked it in a way apparently free from all captiousness.

On the first occasion, it is not said who they were, on the second occasion they were disciples of the great St. John, who could not have learnt from him anything but reverence for our Lord. These, moreover, had an additional right, so to say, to put the question, if they were about to be numbered among the disciples of our Lord. There is nothing about our Lord's answer to show that He thought them unfriendly. On the contrary, He speaks, parabolically indeed, but still openly, and He gives them a far fuller instruction than was required for the simple answer to their question. He lays down again the great principles which had guided His choice in determining not to legislate as yet for His disciples on the point in question. On some occasions, when He had to answer captious questions, He was very reserved in the answers which He made. On these two occasions there was no reserve, although the principles which He enounced were clothed in parabolical and epigrammatical language. Such language is not always baffling, it is often the very best vehicle for great truths, which it sums up in a manner which fixes them in the memory and stimulates reflection. On the former of the two occasions of which we are speaking, the little band of the Twelve Apostles had not yet been selected, and there is no reason for thinking that all, even of those who had already been called, were present. It is hardly likely that the question about eating and drinking with publicans and sinners would have been put in the presence of St. Matthew, and the disciples are spoken of in the third person. On the occasion with which we are now dealing, the Apostles must probably have been with our Lord, and it may have been for them, as well as for the disciples of St. John, that He again repeated the great principles contained in His reply.

These principles have already been explained in that



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part of the present work in which the former incident, so exactly resembling that now before us, has been considered. As set forth on the present occasion, they are three. There is first the principle contained in the words about the children of the Bridegroom, that is, the friends and companions who used to keep the bridegroom company at the joyful time when he received his bride as his own. It has been already remarked that the figure of the Bridegroom, as applied to our Lord, although it is found in the Canticles and other books of the Old Testament, was first used of our Lord, after His coming in the flesh, by the glorious St. John himself. Thus the disciples of the Saint would recognize his language, and perhaps would be reminded of his words when he spoke of himself as the friend of the Bridegroom, rejoicing to hear his voice as he communed with his bride. To such friends the days of the bridal joys would hardly seem a fit time for regulating times of hard labour and service, and our Lord implied that there would be a kind of incongruity in exacting at once the penitential exercises which were to be practised by Christians. In a most true sense the time of His own personal preaching was but a beginning, a first taste, an exceptional period, in the spiritual history of the Church. There is nothing in all her system, as we see it at the present day, after its many centuries of storm and conflict and growth, which is not founded upon what our Lord did and said during the years of His sojourn upon earth. All is there to be found, but in germ and principle, not in full growth and development. So true is this, that to those who do not understand the importance of the Church in the mind and heart of our Lord, there is a continual temptation to make a difficulty of the undoubted fact, that her organization was left to unfold itself under the direction of the Apostles after

the Day of Pentecost, and is not to be found described in His own words in the Gospels, as so many points of Christian doctrine are to be found there in full perfection. It is easy to see that if our Lord had legislated on the subject of fasting, in a manner which would have obviated the question of the disciples of St. John, He would have done on that one point what He has done on no other point of the same character. But in doing this, He would not only have been unlike Himself, but He would, as He tells us in those words about the children of the bridegroom, have made rules concerning the more severe parts of discipline in a time of feasting and joy.

The temporary character of the present absence of rule on these subjects is also clearly set forth by our Lord in the words which follow. 'But the day will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.' He did not, as yet speak plainly about His Passion, even to His Apostles. That doctrine was reserved until after the confession of St. Peter, which marked the full growth of the faith of the Apostles in the Divinity of our Lord. Now He speaks of it in gentle and ambiguous terms, for He does not say how the Bridegroom is to be taken away. If the disciples of St. John came to Him, on this occasion, fresh from the news of the martyrdom of their own beloved master, the words of our Lord would have had a singular and striking meaning for them. They would imply that He too was, in due time, to be dealt with by the world, in the same way as St. John Baptist, for He does not say, depart, or go away, but be taken away from them. The time was not far off when mourning and penitential exercises would be quite in their place among His disciples, and would involve no jar or incongruity on account of the joy which overwhelmed their



hearts because of His own Presence. The time was to come, as He told them afterwards, when they should 'desire to see one day of the Son of Man, and they should not see it.'<sup>1</sup> Then all these rules would be supplied, and the mortifications which they enjoined would be salutary from their union with the sufferings which the Bridegroom was to undergo when He was torn from His Bride.

The other two principles of which our Lord here speaks are contained, the first in the image of the new and old cloth used in the same garment, the other in that of the new wine which must not be poured into old bottles. These have been already fully explained elsewhere. The first is the principle, as it may be called, of homogeneity in any Divine system, by which the union of incongruous elements in the same system is forbidden. Every such system, as the system of the Law and the system of the Gospel respectively, has its own spirit, and the outward observances and regulations of each system must be the natural outcome and expression of that system. Under the Gospel as under the Law, every instinct of natural religion was to be taken up and allowed its full expression, but that expression was to be in harmony with the spirit of the Law under the Law, with the spirit of the Gospel under the Gospel. Everything in the Gospel was interior, everything in the Law external, everything in the Gospel was in the spirit of filial love and confidence, everything in the Law in the spirit of fear. Our Lord was laying down in these words the whole principle on which the Apostles acted in their dealing with the Mosaic system. And it is easy to see how many difficulties He would have created for them, if He had at that time made the system of penance and fasting common to the Jewish teachers a matter of

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke xvii. 22.

obligation on His own disciples. But He did far more than not make it a matter of obligation. He made His system interior as well as childlike, and He resisted all suggestions to the contrary as incongruous to its spirit.

The doctrine contained in the apophthegm about the wine and the bottles, goes a little beyond that of the former image, and completes the teaching of our Lord on this momentous subject. It is based on the necessity of sameness of character and harmony of spirit between those who are to live under and practise a religious system, and the rules and provisions of that system itself. Men must first be formed and moulded according to the new spirit, and then they must be given a system of rules in which also that spirit is expressed. An illustration may be found in a matter already referred to, the rules and the spirit of a religious order, for every such order in the Church has a spirit and temper of its own. The great founders of orders, especially those who may be called the most original, have formed their disciples long before they have given them a rule. For a time the rule lives in the members of the order, and nothing more is required, because, in the first fervour of the spiritual life, and while the members are few and live together, the Holy Ghost serves to guide each one according to the same spirit. But in all human things this first beautiful instinctive uniformity must of necessity fall away, and when the rules are made they are the reflection of the spirit which has been manifesting itself without rule, and then in turn they perpetuate this and preserve its uniformity through successive generations. Modern history is full of the failure of paper Constitutions, drawn up in the closet by scientific politicians, and then forced in their integrity upon communities that have no capacity for working them. They are like the armour of Saul, of which David could make no use.



This, in the political and social order, is an illustration of the principle which our Lord here sets forth under the image of the wine and the bottles. He was probably thinking of many other parts of the system which He was to introduce, as well as of that particular matter of detail concerning which the disciples of the Baptist had been questioning Him. They had touched a subject of immense importance, but the importance of which it is likely that they could not yet see. Our Lord's action in this matter, which He must have known would attract attention and draw down on Him a certain amount of censure from the more religious portion of the Jewish nation, was guided by the same heavenly wisdom which made Him so resolutely brave the strongest of Jewish prejudices in His conduct and language concerning the Sabbath Day. In each case He was looking forward to the formation of the Church, and acting in a manner which was not to be fully understood except in the light which the Church would throw upon it. There is this truth included, among many others, in that exclamation of our Lord's at a later date than this, which is recorded by St. Luke, that He had a baptism wherewith He must be baptized, and that He was greatly straitened until it was accomplished. That is, the Passion was to be the foundation of everything which He was to leave behind Him, and, until that great victory was won, there were a thousand things as to which He was obliged to hold back His full counsel, and to act in a manner which even those whose hearts were most truly with Him did not comprehend.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *The daughter of Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood.*

St. Matt. ix. 18—26 ; St. Mark v. 22—43 ; St. Luke viii. 41—56 ;  
*Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 66.

OUR Lord had hardly ended His answer to the questions of the disciples of St. John, when He was interrupted by a more urgent appeal on His charity from another quarter. Indeed, it seems as if He had delayed this applicant, in order to answer the disciples of the Precursor. ‘While He was speaking these things unto them, behold a certain ruler, a man whose name was Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue, came and adored Him, and he fell down at the feet of Jesus, beseeching Him that He would come into his house, for he had an only daughter, almost twelve years old, and she was dying, and he besought Him much, saying, My daughter is even now dead, at the point of death, but come lay Thy hands upon her and she shall live, that she may be safe and may live. And Jesus rising up followed him, with His disciples, and a great multitude followed Him and they thronged Him.’ Thus it was that our Lord could not withdraw Himself from the occasions of mercy, and although He was at this time so much bent on secrecy and retirement, He could not, as it were, escape from the discharge of His great office of the Redeemer of mankind and the healer of all evils, whether of body or of soul. Jairus was probably one of His friends, a friend also of the centurion whose servant our Lord had healed



at His last visit to the city, and of the nobleman whose son had been cured the year before, while our Lord was at a distance. They were a little knot of pious souls, to whom His powers were well known, and who had a sort of claim on Him, for the frequent use which He had made of the synagogue, which one of them had built and over which the other presided. It must have been a piece of sudden good news to Jairus, that the Master had returned so soon from the other side of the lake, and before that return they must have been looking for Him anxiously. Then the sail was seen in the distance, and the news reached them that our Lord would soon be on the shore. We gather from St. Luke, that they were waiting for Him, and it may have been a momentary disappointment to them that He gave His first attention to the disciples of His dear friend and Precursor.

However, though our Lord assented at once to the invitation of this good man, Jairus had to experience another trial of his patience before he could rejoice at the presence of our Lord in his house. There was another humble and retiring soul, watching for the arrival of our Lord, and determining within herself to make her venture in applying, in her own way, to the well-known compassion of the Master. ‘And there was a certain woman, having an issue of blood twelve years, who had bestowed all her substance on physicians, and had suffered many things from many physicians, and could not be healed by any, and was nothing the better, but rather worse, who as she heard of Jesus, came in the crowd behind Him, and touched His garment, for she said within herself, if I shall touch only His garment, I shall be healed. And immediately the issue of her blood stopped, and forthwith the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was cured of the evil.’

The Evangelists have so arranged their description of this poor sufferer that we have here a perfect picture of the misery of her bodily state, the inveterate character of the evil, the costliness of the remedies which she had used, and the utter inefficiency of all human physicians in the case. Her action is one of great modesty, reverence, humility, and also of great confidence in our Lord, though perhaps she may have had but an imperfect notion as to His Divine Person, thinking that she might be healed by Him without His knowing it. The hems of the garments, or rather perhaps the fringes, were in some degree kept sacred by the Jews, but the expression of touching the hem of the garment is one by which simple humility may be conveyed, as when St. John Baptist said that he was not worthy to loose the latchet of the shoe of our Lord. Perhaps it might have been dangerous to leave her imperfect ideas uncorrected, as it might have led to the using of such opportunities as that of which she availed herself, as if the garments of our Lord were amulets or charms, and had in them some intrinsic power of their own for healing diseases. But our Lord was probably influenced by other considerations in His forcing the poor woman before us to declare what had taken place. He knew what was passing, or what had passed in the house of his friend Jairus, since he had left it for the purpose of calling our Lord to his aid. The messengers were already on the way, bearing to Jairus the tidings that since he had left his daughter, she had passed away and that there was no longer any hope. The people of Capharnaum had seen many wonderful miracles of our Lord, but they had had no experience of His power to raise the dead to life. As far as we know, the one instance in which that power had been exercised, was that of the widow's son of Naim. Jairus therefore would be in danger of failing in the faith necessary, accord-



ing to the ordinance of God, for the performance of the great miracle which our Lord had in His mind to work in favour of his child, and he might be strengthened and confirmed in faith, at this time of his special trial, by the revelation both of what had just taken place in the case of the woman with an issue of blood, and also of the perfect knowledge of our Lord as to what had passed, as she had hoped, in secret. For such reasons as these, then, our Lord determined to make this case public, though on other occasions He had often been strict in commanding that His works of mercy of this kind should be concealed.

‘And immediately Jesus, knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out from Him, turning to the multitude, said, Who hath touched My garments? And His disciples, Peter and those that were with Him, said to Him, Master, the multitude throng and press Thee, Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who hath touched Me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched Me, for I know that virtue is gone out of Me. And He looked about to see her who had done this. But the woman, fearing and trembling, seeing that she was not hid, knowing what was done in her, came trembling and fell down before His feet, and declared before all the people for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was immediately cured, and told Him all the truth. But Jesus turning and seeing her said, Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace, and be thou whole of thy disease. And the woman was healed from that hour.’

Here again we come on an incident, for the complete understanding of which it is necessary that we should form right notions concerning the Sacred Humanity of our Lord. His words might seem to imply, in the first place, that virtue could go out from Him, for the purpose

and end of healing diseases, as it might go out of some medicinal herb or spring, simply by the contact of the person to be healed with any part of His Body, or with His garments which were in contact with His Body. In the second place, they might be understood as signifying that He required to be informed of the person in whose favour this miracle had been wrought, although He was conscious that it had been wrought in favour of some one, as if the power of healing which belonged to His Body, as the instrument and organ of His Divinity, was almost like a physical thing—a handkerchief or something of that sort, of which He might feel the departure at the moment when it was taken, but not necessarily know who it was that had taken it. But in the first place, our Lord did not need to be informed, either now or at any other time, of what was happening about Him, and the question which He now asked was not asked for His own information, but for the confirmation of the faith of the disciples and of Jairus, and other similar reasons. In the second place, although His Sacred Body, as the temple of the Divinity, had the power of healing all diseases and infirmities in those who touched it, a power which is now and then dwelt on by St. Luke, who lingers over such details with great and loving attention, still this power was only exercised and put into use when He Himself chose, and not at other times. He frequently used the touch, or the laying on of hands, for the cure of diseases, but at other times He healed and wrought other miracles by a simple command. When the Evangelists say that virtue went forth from Him, or that as many as touched the hem of His garments were healed, they speak of cases in which our Lord willed it so to be, and they use this language about virtue going forth from Him only on such occasions, and not when the miracles were wrought by a mere command or word.



Thus we must recognize this inherent virtue of the Sacred Humanity, and at the same time understand that it was only exerted in this particular way when our Lord so chose. It cannot be doubted that His Sacred Heart had watched over this poor lady, during the whole of the time when she was debating within herself how to obtain from Him the boon which she desired, that He knew of her approach, and that it was in consequence of a direct and conscious act of His will that her cure was wrought. But it was in His mind not only to heal her, but to use her cure for the benefit of others, as has been said, and also to confirm and strengthen and elevate her faith, which had in it something of imperfection. The question which He asked was asked for the sake of bringing out, in the most natural way, what He desired to make manifest, and not because He could not have pointed her out at once if He had so chosen. The simple action which is described by the Evangelists, of His looking round to see her who had done this, contained the truth of what we are speaking. For our Lord would not have looked round for a person whom He could not recognize when He saw her. His eyes sought her out, and by that very search she knew, as the Evangelists say; that she could not be hid. She could hide herself from the eyes of men, for her action in touching Him was one of which no one could take particular notice, especially as so many were pressing on Him in the crowd. But His eyes she could not escape, and so she had to come forward trembling and astonished before the whole crowd, to kneel at His sacred feet, and acknowledge all that had taken place in her. It was this that our Lord intended, and He at once reassured her against any fear she might have that she had offended Him by her act. ‘He said to her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace.’ It was true that her

faith had made her whole, though the direct and principal agent in her healing was the supernatural power which had gone forth from Him. For faith was ordinarily the condition on which His miracles were wrought, and if she had not had faith, she would never have touched Him, nor would her touch have been made the means of her cure. And our Lord always insisted on this condition. Moreover, He always spoke, even on such occasions as this, when He had manifested His Divine power and authority over nature or disease, with the utmost humility and meekness, attributing the effects to the human cause in those who benefited by them, and not to the supernatural cause of His own touch or word.

All this incident had taken some little time, and all the while, short as the interval may have been, the loving father of the girl whom our Lord was on His way to heal, was standing by, perhaps inwardly fretting even at a moment's delay. And then, as it seemed, all his hopes were at once dashed to the ground. Our Lord was still speaking to the lady who had been healed, when the news came that the girl was dead. 'As He was yet speaking, some come to the ruler of the synagogue, from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead, why dost thou trouble Him? trouble Him not. And Jesus, hearing this word, said to the ruler of the synagogue, the father of the maid,' as if Jairus had turned to Him in his agony of grief, 'Fear not, believe only, and she shall be safe.' We are told nothing of the state of mind of the father, but we gather from the narrative that he had sufficient faith not to distrust the word of our Lord, coming so soon on that manifestation of His miraculous power which had just been witnessed.

It was now clearly our Lord's intention to work, here at Capharnaum, this second great miracle of the raising



the dead to life. His immense charity was thus, as it were, forced to override the counsels of His prudence, which had restrained Him from any great manifestation of His power in this place for some time past—ever since, it would appear, the miracle wrought on the servant of the centurion. This and the other miracles which immediately followed on this memorable day, were to have the effect of driving Him away again, never to return as before. There is but a single instance on record of anything approaching the miraculous as done by Him in Capharnaum after this day. He at once took what precautions were now possible. It is possible that the delay may have been ordered in His Providence, so that the girl might die, and be raised to life, rather than be cured. For the news that she was dead would incidentally secure greater privacy to our Lord in her father's house. It seems from the language of the Evangelists, that our Lord at once dismissed the crowd, as far as was possible. This may have been comparatively easy, if they were allowed to draw the natural inference from the news of the death of the girl who had been so ill. For that would lead them at once to disperse, giving up all hope of witnessing a miracle. St. Mark gives us this intimation in his exact description of the circumstances, for he speaks of the separation from our Lord's company even of the greater number of the Apostles, before he speaks of our Lord's going on to the house. 'He admitted not any man to follow Him, but Peter and James, and John, the brother of James, and they come to the house of the ruler of the synagogue.' A second separation took place later, for it appears that on arriving at the house, our Lord found a crowd already there. There may have been time enough, since the maiden had expired, for the collection of the usual mourners. 'And seeing a tumult,

and people weeping and wailing much, when He was come to the house, He suffered not any man to go in with Him, but Peter and James and John, and the father and mother of the maiden. And He saw the minstrels and the multitude making a rout, and going in He saith to them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth! Give place, for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And He having put them all forth, taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with Him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And taking the damsel by the hand, He saith to her, Talitha cumi, which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say to thee, arise! And immediately the damsel rose up and walked, and she was twelve years old. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And He charged them strictly that no man should know it, and commanded that something should be given her to eat.'

Our Lord, all through this incident, was desirous of hiding the miracle which He was about to work from the knowledge of men, for the motives which forced Him at this time to avoid publicity in every possible way. But we see plainly also that He spoke with His usual humility, so as to make the least of what He was to do. There was also a reason of divine prudence in the words which He used, for by asserting that the maiden was not dead, but asleep, He drew from the witnesses of her death, and from those who had seen the body as it lay on the bed where she had died, the strongest possible confirmation of the truth of the great miracle He was going to perform. His words were not false, in the sense in which He spoke them, for that is sleep out of which there is to be a speedy awakening, and that is death out of which there is to be no awaken-



ing until the Day of Judgment. But, in the case of this girl, she was to be again among her family and friends in a very short time, and was to live among them during the remainder of an ordinary lifetime. Nor could she have been dealt with, in the world beyond the grave, as one whose time of trial was permanently at an end, and who was never to return to this earth. Thus, in a most true sense, she was asleep, and was soon to wake, though in another sense what the mourners and wailers said of her was true, that she was really dead. Her soul had left her body, there was no life in her, she could never be restored to her parents in this world, except by the power of Him Who is the Master of life and death.

The three chosen disciples, and the father and mother of the deceased damsel, were alone in the room with our Lord and the lifeless corpse. These were witnesses enough for the perfect authentication of the miracle, whenever it was necessary to authenticate it, and the whole crowd of those who had been put forth by our Lord were witnesses to the truth of the death of the damsel. Her new life would be spent among those who had known her, and thus there could not be wanting any portion of the evidence which might be reasonably required. But it was still necessary, for the reasons already mentioned, that the miracle should not be public. Our Lord had not let anything hinder Him from the manifestation of the miracle wrought on the woman with the issue of blood, for that had been necessary, or at least opportune, for the confirmation of the faith of the father of this girl. The details of this second miracle are perfectly simple. It was wrought both by word and by touch of that Sacred Humanity, which had in it all healing power for the ills of men. In these circumstances our Lord not only acted as was His wont, that the power might be seen to proceed directly from His

Sacred Person, but also did what was natural in arousing from sleep one who lay on a couch. He took her by the hand, spoke to her, and lifted her up. Her spirit returned, and she arose immediately and walked. All these circumstances show the completeness of the cure wrought on her, for in ordinary cases, a person who had just been brought back from the other world would have been weak, and unable to move with the vigour of one who had never been struck down by disease or death. And He bade them give her to eat, to show, as it seems, the reality of her restored life, and that she was not a phantom. 'And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And He charged them strictly that no man should know it.' But in this, as in other cases, it was impossible for the miracle to be kept secret. The parents could not understand the motives of charity which caused our Lord to insist so much on secrecy, and besides, the girl herself was there, the living evidence of what had been done for her by our Lord. It could not be but that the servants and friends of the family would soon come to know of her restoration, and in a city like Capharnaum, the news of such a wonder would very soon spread. 'The fame went abroad into all that country.'

It cannot be doubted that this publicity of so great a miracle would exasperate, still more than ever, the hostility of the enemies of our Lord, and this may account for the line of conduct which was now adopted by Him of keeping more than ever aloof from Capharnaum, in which city we are not certain that He ever spent more than a few passing hours at a time after this day. But of this we shall have to speak hereafter. The miracle before us suggests two heads of consideration, distinct the one from the other, and on these we may spend what remains to us of the present chapter.



In the first place, the incidents of this day, of which we have not yet come to the end, but especially the two miracles just spoken of, exemplify very pointedly a principle in the working of God's Providence which is very well worthy of particular attention. The two miracles which we have lately been considering, when taken together, form an instance of that connection which constantly subsists between the lives of different persons, whether known to or related to one another, or not. It is clear that the incident of the cure of the lady with an issue of blood, had a marked influence in bringing about the miracle of the raising of the girl to life, and that, on the other hand, the subject of the former miracle would not have had the opportunity of drawing near to our Lord, as He was passing through the streets in the midst of the crowd, but for the petition of Jairus to our Lord that He would come and lay His hands on his daughter. This is the incomprehensible marvel of the wisdom of God, that He makes our lives link in one with another in so close a manner, and provides for the good of each one of a large number of souls by the same stroke of His hand, while He makes us almost infinitely dependent one on another, so that no single life of all His children, is without its continual and manifold influences on the lives of those around him. It is probable that the revelation of these workings of Providence will be among the most beautiful parts of that great manifestation of the ways of God which will take place at the last day. One great reason for the General Judgment, as distinguished from that which each soul undergoes singly at the moment of death, is this declaration of God's ways in the treatment of men, not singly, but in the various relations and mutual offices in which they are placed in the world as it actually is. This is one of the great points which stand out prominently, in connection with

these miracles on the last day, as it seems, when our Lord was at Capharnaum for any length of time. The circumstances of the case have led the Evangelists to trace out for us more closely than usual the connection between one of these incidents and the rest, a connection which might have been traced out in thousands of other such occurrences, if such had been the will of our Lord in the composition of the Gospel history. It is chiefly with regard to Capharnaum that we have hints of this kind. We seem to see the traces of a history of the dealings of our Lord with a certain number of chosen souls, many of whom became very conspicuous in His service. We have mentioned the little cluster of friends who belonged to our Lord's disciples in that city—the nobleman who began, so to say, the series of mercies, by obtaining from Him the healing of his son when our Lord was at a distance, the Roman centurion who built the synagogue in which our Lord so often taught, and it is natural to join to him Jairus, the ruler of the same synagogue. All these men, and their families, were the objects, so to say, of a connected Providential action. If the circle included a Gentile officer, it may also have taken in the good publican St. Matthew, perhaps also, though this is conjecture, the family of St. Martha and St. Mary Magdalene. This little band of friends would probably have made themselves the friends of our Blessed Lady, and of those cousins of our Lord with whom she lived. Thus in the very midst of this city, which, after all, was to reject our Lord and to acquire for itself the fatal celebrity given to it by His denunciations of its hardness of heart, there would be this little assembly of devout souls and followers of our Lord, for most of whom He had exerted His miraculous powers. The mercy shown to one led on to the mercies earned by others, and thus the precious grace spread from heart to heart.



Another very striking thought in connection with this subject, is that which is suggested by the contrast between the miracle on the widow's son of Naim and that on the daughter of Jairus, which also may be compared with that which was afterwards to be wrought in favour of Lazarus. These three miracles, as is well known, exhaust the list of the occasions on which our Lord raised the dead to life. Their history may be used as tracing out the gradual deepening and growth of the hostility to Him on the part of the Pharisees, and the influence which that hostility had on His own line of conduct. The scene at Naim is one of unmixed triumph and joy. Our Lord is accompanied by a crowd of disciples, and a large concourse of people are present from the city itself, to which the widow and her son belonged. There seems no sign of opposition or of incredulity. All is peaceful and calm, lit up by an intense light of faith and hope and charity. There is no concealment on our Lord's part, there is not a voice raised against Him after the wonder has been worked. The miracle, public as it is, is unsolicited, for no one would have ventured to ask for such a boon at that time. What no one asks for, our Lord gives, out of simple compassion in the first instance, and for many great ends of His own in the second. The rumour spreads over all the land, and reaches even the Baptist in his lonely dungeon in the castle of Machærus, and thus its effect is to bring about that solemn embassy, so to call it, of St. John to our Lord, when he asked Him whether He was He that was to come, or whether they looked for another.

The contrast is great in the scene at Capharnaum. Our Lord is most careful to hide what He is about to do, and what He has done. He puts out all but the very fewest witnesses, and these He charges not to make it known. He is in the midst of His enemies, and His

works of mercy are slandered with a malice worthy rather of Hell than of earth. Out of mere charity, our Lord is obliged to hide what He does, though that is a work of the highest power and of the tenderest compassion. He cannot help doing what He does, and yet He is forced to draw over it a veil, for fear of intensifying still more miserably the sin of the enemies who dog His every step. When all is over, and the fame of the great work of mercy flies abroad all over the land, He is compelled to withdraw Himself still more, and after all, the great result is that the atrocious calumny about casting out devils by means of the prince of the devils is immediately renewed. An equally striking contrast is observable if these two miracles of resurrection, so different in their circumstances and consequences, are compared to the other great miracle of the raising of Lazarus, worked at a time when our Lord had already retired from the gaze of His enemies. He could not refuse to listen to the touching words of Martha and Mary. 'Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick.' He knew what it would cost Him. The miracle was wrought before a large company, some of whom were already more than half determined on His death. It was wrought amid our Lord's own tears, He makes a public address of thanksgiving to His Father, and He has to encourage Martha at the last moment, lest her faith might fail. The miracle was the most stupendous, one of the most public, the most fatal in its consequences of all that He ever wrought. It became the immediate occasion of the plot against His life, which was at last executed by means of the treachery of Judas.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *The Evil Tongue.*

St. Matt. ix. 27—34 ; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 67.

It has already been pointed out that St. Matthew has arranged a great series of miracles, at an early stage of his Gospel,<sup>1</sup> and that he has taken some of them altogether out of their chronological context, for the sake of putting under one head, as it were, a large number of various manifestations of power of this kind on the part of our Lord. In this way we have the miracles on the leper, on the centurion's servant, on the mother-in-law of St. Peter, on a very great number of sick and possessed persons on the same day at Capharnaum. These are followed by the calming of the storm on the lake, the deliverance of the Gerasene demoniacs, the healing of the paralytic, the healing of the woman with an issue of blood and of the daughter of Jairus. Thus the first Evangelist has collected together, it may be said, instances of the exertion of our Lord's miraculous power on every kind of disease, on the devils in possession of men, on the elements themselves, and, finally, over life and death. When we consider the purpose for which this marvellous chain has evidently been woven by St. Matthew, we can feel little surprise that he should have neglected the order of time for the sake of so convenient a collection of these evidences of the Divine mission of his Master. It has also been remarked, that

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. viii. ix.

where such hints are especially necessary, as when the Evangelist has made a great stride in time from one part of our Lord's Ministry to another, he has, as of set purpose, added a word or two to guide us as to the true place in time of the anecdotes which he has combined. It is on this account that we have felt safe in placing the application of the scribe to be allowed to follow our Lord, immediately before the miracle of the stilling of the storm, and also in placing the question of the disciples of St. John on the subject of fasting, immediately before the coming of Jairus to beg our Lord to come and heal his daughter. The same guidance carries us a little further on the present occasion, and enables us to fill up the incidents of this remarkable day, after the return of our Lord from the other side of the Lake, with two more miracles, the last of the miracles, strictly so called, which, as far as we know, were ever wrought by our Lord in this favoured city of Capharnaum.<sup>2</sup> Here also St. Matthew, though he relates these miracles long before their time, at least long before many things in the Life of our Lord which actually preceded them, gives us sufficient guidance to make us certain that they are to be placed here and not elsewhere.

‘And as Jesus passed from thence,’ that is, from the house of the ruler of the synagogue whose daughter He had restored to life, ‘there followed Him two blind men, crying out and saying, Have mercy on us, O Son of David! And when He was come to the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus saith to them, Do you believe that I can do this unto you? They say to Him, Yea, Lord. Then He touched their eyes,

<sup>2</sup> The only exception to this statement that can be found is the incident of the payment of the didrachma (St. Matt. xvii. 23—26), which gave occasion to a miracle only in the larger sense of the word, and this miracle does not seem to have been public.



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saying, According to your faith let it be done unto you. And their eyes were opened, and Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know this. But they going abroad, spread His fame about in all the country. And when they were gone out, behold they brought Him a dumb man possessed with a devil. And after the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke. And the multitudes wondered, saying, Never was the like seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, By the prince of the devils He casteth out devils.' It is easy to see from this last mentioned circumstance, that the miracle belongs to the time with which we are now concerned, when the enemies of our Lord had been driven by the terrible necessities of their opposition to Him at any cost, to this most detestable calumny and blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Thus we are a long way beyond that epoch in His Ministry in which the first miracles on the list of St. Matthew are to be placed, such as the healing of the leper and the paralytic who was let down before Him from the roof.

These new miracles have little that is characteristic in them, as distinguished from others that our Lord had worked of the same kind. But our Lord's way of dealing with the poor blind men is remarkable. He seems not to have paid them any attention while He was passing through the streets, on His way to the house which served as His home at Capharnaum. This is very intelligible, when we remember how anxious He was at this time to avoid public notice. The blind men must have had guides and assistants, for they followed Him on the way, and when He had reached the house, these persons managed to bring them into our Lord's own presence. Now He could converse with them without notice of others, and He simply asked them concerning their faith. It reads as if our Lord were

catechising them, and as if He might have declined to help them, if they had not answered Him with full confidence and faith. 'They say to Him, Yea, Lord.' Thus they had a claim, a right, it might almost be said, to the exertion on their behalf of His miraculous powers, and this He seems to have acknowledged, for He said, 'According to your faith let it be done to you.' The miracle was immediately wrought. Our Lord repeated to them the strict injunction which He had given in the case of the daughter of Jairus, and with the same result. 'And Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know this. But they going out, spread His fame abroad in all that country.' A number of motives combined to make them disobey Him. It was not easy for them to escape the questionings of those who knew them, and thus a certain number of persons must have heard of the miracle. Nor could they understand that it was not only out of humility that our Lord thus acted. Why should the fame of so great a benefit be kept hidden? There were other sufferers beside themselves, and these might as well have the opportunity of hearing while the wonder-worker was as yet in their city. They could not know that the simple fact of their publication of His powers might make it impossible for them to be exercised in favour of others. And so it came about, that the friends of the dumb man who was possessed by the devil came to know of our Lord's presence, and brought him to Him. It was the most natural thing in the world, and yet, on account of the malice of His enemies, it was for the moment one of the most mischievous.

In this case, of course, there was no interrogatory about faith. Our Lord could not but help this poor man, for the scandal which the cure would give was a scandal wicked in itself, unreasonable, and so not to be



attended to in any way. Not the less, however, would it drive Him away from the city which had so long been known as His own. 'And after the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke, and the multitudes wondered, saying, Never was the like seen in Israel.' They were not unaccustomed to the casting out of devils in certain cases, as we learn from the argument which our Lord used when this calumny about the league with Beelzebub was first set afloat. But it was altogether unknown for the disease or infirmity of the body to be healed at the same time, and by the same act by which the devil was ejected. This was a new and distinct miracle, and thus appears to have attracted especial attention on this occasion, as before. There was therefore nothing left for the Pharisees but to choose one of the only two possible alternatives. They must either acknowledge that He had with Him the power of God, and then they would have had to explain why they did not believe in Him, or they must adhere, at all costs, to their own invented calumny, that He cast out devils by Beelzebub. Even this did not explain the miracle. It left the miraculous cure of the dumb person out of sight, unless it were supposed that the devil had had some power over his organs of speech and had released his hold on them at the moment of the dispossession. But there was no other opening for their malice, and so 'the Pharisees said, By the prince of the devils He casteth out devils.' On the former occasion on which this calumny had been, for the first time, invented, St. Mark<sup>3</sup> tells us that it originated with the Scribes who had been sent down from Jerusalem to watch our Lord's movements. It may be supposed that, at the time of the miracle now before us, the calumny was adopted by the Pharisees of Capharnaum themselves, as the official

<sup>3</sup> St. Mark iii. 22.

answer, so to say, to be given to the argument drawn from such miracles in favour of our Lord's mission. Some of them, as it appears, had already made an arrangement with the Herodians, members of Herod's administration, the object of which was to take our Lord's life.

It is not the habit of the Evangelists to dwell on the motives of our Lord's line of action, at this or that place of their history, although they furnish us with quite sufficient indications of those motives. It is clear in the present case, that the renewal of this detestable calumny drove our Lord away once more from this His own city, and that, now that even there the calumny had been set on foot, it so far influenced Him as to make Him very sparing indeed in His visits, even for a short time. But we may well dwell on the effects of this weapon of opposition to our Lord, for two reasons. First, it was the most efficacious weapon that the powers of Hell invented in their warfare against Him. And in the second place, it is the weapon of which those same powers of Hell have made greater use than of any other, in their warfare against the Catholic Church in all ages since the day of Pentecost. It was fitting, as it might seem, that the Life of our Lord Himself should contain a very marked anticipation of the use of calumny in hindering His work, seeing that no other weapon was to be half so instrumental in hindering the work of the Church in after ages. Our Lord had immense difficulties to contend with, in the dulness of His own disciples, in the carnal views of the majority of the holy nation, to whom He was specially sent, He had the natural passions of man ranged against Him, He had to contend with the self-interest of some, the political views of others, with a priesthood corrupted to the core by sensuality and covetousness, with the astute and profligate Herod, with the



ambition of Caiaphas, and with the human respect by which Pilate was ruled, and which had beneath it only too true a foundation in the character of the Emperor Tiberius. And, if the opposition of man had been little, there was also the deadly and crafty enmity of the legions of Hell to account with. Yet it may fairly be said, that nothing could have stopped Him from the conversion of the whole nation, which He might then have made a most powerful instrument for the conversion of the world, if it had not been for the power of lying which was set in motion against Him. It was this that turned away the hearts of the most well-disposed among the people, the very persons who were the most religious, and in other respects the most natural subjects for His teaching. These people would be the most ready to receive their impressions from their own legitimate teachers, who sat in the chair of Moses, and who were the persons who propagated this lie concerning Him. And it was the fatal power of lying which, in the end, brought about the Crucifixion, because it persuaded the people that He had been at last detected as an impostor. Thus the evil tongue prevented one large class from receiving our Lord, and made another still larger class abandon Him at the time of His Passion. That abandonment led directly to the choosing of Barabbas rather than our Lord, and to the horrible cries of 'Crucify Him !' before which Pilate quailed.

It is only natural to find that what is true of our Lord, is also most perfectly true of the Catholic Church, which He has left behind Him in the world to do His work and establish His Kingdom. She too has had most powerful enemies to overcome. She has had against her the whole power of paganism, a system infinitely pleasant to the natural man and his lower passions, the indulgence of which was consecrated by the cunning of

Hell, which set before him as the divinities whom he was to worship and imitate, the foulest of his own lusts canonized and deified. Such as were the gods of paganism, such was the worship by which they were honoured. The Church had to fight against the whole power also of the Roman Empire, an Empire which might have lasted to this day, and have been spread all over the world in peaceful and beneficent dominion, if its rulers had known their own interests and united them with the advancement and protection of the Church. And, moreover, a whole army of worldly interests was arrayed against her, as we see even in the tumult raised at Ephesus against St. Paul. The pagan priesthoods were as well endowed as the Anglican Establishment at the present day, the philosophers, the soothsayers, all the motley rabble of 'false prophets,' and pretenders to spiritual power, 'theosophy,' magic, occult knowledge, and the like, were touched in their most vital interests by the presence of the Spouse of Christ. It was then as it is now, only that the superstitions were more powerful, the incredulity of the people more profound, the gains of the impostors, and the numbers of those who lived by professional vice far more immense.

But what was the most powerful of all the weapons which the Church had to contend against? It was not the power of the Cæsars, or of any other of those numberless influences arrayed against her, but the power of lying. It was this that set the populace in arms against her, it was this that made her children pay the penalty for the foul abominations of the most abandoned of heretics, this which brought upon her the hatred of the whole human race. The sword of the Cæsars themselves could never have raged as it did against her, but for the calumnies which were commonly believed. She can brave persecution, she can defy the power of the sword, she is compa-



ratively powerless against the evil tongue. This was from the very first taken up as the weapon which alone could deal with the Church. The whole army of her enemies could at least unite on this point, if on no other. The use of slander could combine all the other influences which existed in human society, the people, the rulers, the philosophers, all could be set against her by systematic and widespread calumnies.

We find exactly the same phenomenon in that most hateful of all the persecutions which the Catholic Church has had to undergo, the persecution of heretics and schismatics. These men have been found in all ranks and orders of life, and there have been many among them who began with strictness of virtue and austerity of life, and assailed the truth, originally, in ignorance rather than in malice. And what is true of the founders of heresies, is still more true of their followers, who have in many cases been educated in error instead of adopting it for themselves. Leaving aside considerations of personal probity and honesty, of which we are no fit judges in individual cases, we see in the warfare of these men against the Church the same characteristic use of the Satanic weapon of the evil tongue. A great number of them have done and do nothing but abuse and calumniate. They do not prove the truth of their own doctrines, or the holiness of their own sects, they do not defend their own claims to the Catholicity and Apostolicity and Unity which must be the notes of the true Church wherever it exists, half so much as they vilify and malign the only Church which appears to possess these notes. When persons go to them in distress of conscience, as is so frequently the case in the days in which we live, because they cannot find peace and rest, unity of doctrine and the voice of authority, in their own separated communions, the favourite device

of these men is, not to show them the unknown excellencies of these communions and their actual union with the great body of the Church all over the world, but rather to assure them that the Church is an impostor, and thus practically direct them to a denial of the Creed and to infidelity. The main staple of their argument is negation, falsehood, calumny. And in many cases they succeed only too well in the destruction of all faith. Souls are turned away from the only Mother to whom has been committed the words of eternal life, because heretical teachers, on their own authority, assert that she has a devil or is in league with Beelzebub.

Thus it is that the Church in all ages, and certainly not least in our own, has the same fortune in the world with her Divine Master. Lying has ever been the chief weapon of her enemies, the weapon never laid aside, and the most successful. The power of lying arises from the constitution of society, in which God has made us immensely dependent on the veracity one of another, and it arises also from our inborn readiness to judge of other men from what we see and hear, and, in the third place, from the inclination of the degenerate human heart to judge unfavourably rather than favourably, to believe evil rather than to believe good. A lie flies over the world, and yet there may be very few who are liars in repeating it. For what is one man's lie, is the credulity or carelessness or mistake of another, and it becomes a religious conviction, and a tenet that it is a duty to act upon, in a third or a fourth. This explains to us those startling words of our Lord to His Apostles, that the time would come when people would think it a service done to God to kill them. We see this immense influence of mendacity in the most modern books of controversy against the Church, in *Manuals*, and *Preservatives*, and *Plain Reasons*, and the like. Many of these books, though not



all, are written by men of respectability and good character, who are yet only the repeaters of a lie a thousand times refuted, one which with due industry they might have known to be a lie, nay, which after more consideration some of them have the grace to acknowledge as such. The test of such men is found in their readiness to acknowledge their misstatements. Some of them do this. Others promise to do it, but live for years and die without retracting their calumnies—for calumnies they become, when they are left unretracted in the face of confutation, though they may at first have been simple inaccuracies or blunders. But if it is so difficult to get even men of respectability to make a retractation, when it is irresistibly brought home to them, how much more difficult must it be to eradicate from the mind of whole populations the falsehoods which they have drunk in with their mother's milk ! To take only a single instance of a successful falsehood. At this moment, a large portion of the European and Christian world believe implicitly in the calumnies which were suggested to Pascal by men who might have known better, and which he did not examine. It so happened that he had a matchless style, and that, from the circumstances of the day in France, society was full of elements which made men desirous to believe the falsehoods which he sent abroad. They have been refuted again and again, but all to no purpose. So it is with other similar falsehoods, which have been sent into the world under the name of learning and authority, but which are yet in their origin the simplest and most barefaced misrepresentations. Lying is Satan's parody on truth, it is the word of Satan, as truth is the word of God. On account of the corruption of the world, the word of God is less powerful in it than the word of Satan.

## APPENDIX.

### *Harmony of the Gospels as to the Second Period of the Public Life.*

#### § 56.—*The calumny of the Pharisees about Beelzebub.*

Matt. xii. 22—37.

Then was offered to Him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that he spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?

But the Pharisees hearing it, said, This man casteth not out devils but by Beelzebub, the prince of devils.

And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself shall be made desolate, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how then shall his kingdom stand?

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.

Mark iii. 22—30.

And the scribes who were come down from Jerusalem, said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of devils He casteth out devils.

And after He had called them together, He said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan be risen up against himself, he is divided, and cannot stand, but hath an end.



Matt. xii. 29—37.

Or how can any one enter into the house of a strong man, and rifle his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? and then he will rifle his house. He that is not with Me, is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth.

Therefore I say to you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but he that shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree evil, and its fruit evil. For by the fruit the tree is known. O generation of vipers, how can you speak good things, whereas you are evil? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Mark iii. 27—30.

No man can enter into the house of a strong man and rifle his goods, unless he first bind the strong man, and then he will rifle his house.

Amen I say to you, that all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and the blasphemies wherewith they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, shall never have forgiveness, but shall be guilty of an everlasting sin. Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.

§ 57.—*The Scribes and Pharisees seeking for a sign. The close union of the disciples to our Lord.*

Matt. xii. 38—50.

Mark iii. 31—35.

Luke 19—21.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, Master, we would see a sign from Thee.

Who answering said to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

The men of Nineve shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas. And behold a greater than Jonas here. The queen of the south shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon here.



Matt. xii. 43—49.

And when an unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out. And coming he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is made worse than the first. So shall it be also to this wicked generation.

And He was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold His mother and His brethren stood without, seeking to speak to Him. And one said *r* to Him, Behold Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without seeking Thee. But He answering him that told Him, said, Who is My mother, and who are My brethren? And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples, He said, Behold My

Mark iii. 31—34.

And His mother and His brethren came, and standing without, sent unto Him, calling Him. And the multitude sat about Him, and they said to Him, Behold Thy mother and Thy brethren without seek for Thee. And answering them, He said, Who is My mother and My brethren? And looking round about on them who sat about Him, He saith, Behold My mother and My

Luke viii. 19—21.

And His mother and brethren came unto Him, and they could not come at Him for the crowd. And it was told Him, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to see Thee.

Who answering, said to them, My

Matt. xii. 50.

mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father, that is in Heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother.

Mark iii. 35.

brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of God, he is My brother, and My sister, and My mother.

Luke viii. 21.

mother and My brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it.

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§ 58.—*The Parable of the Sower.*

Matt. xiii. 1—9.

The same day Jesus going out of the house, sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went up into a boat and sat, and all the multitude stood on the shore.

And He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, Behold the sower went out to sow. And whilst he soweth some fell by the way side, and the birds of the air came and ate them up. And other some fell upon rocky ground, where they had not much earth, and they shot up immediately, because they had no depth of earth. And when the sun was risen

Mark iv. 1—9.

And again He began to teach by the sea side, and a great multitude was gathered together unto Him, so that He went up into a boat, and sat in the sea; and all the multitude was upon the land by the sea side.

And He taught them many things in parables, and said unto them in His doctrine, Hear ye. Behold, the sower went out to sow. And whilst he soweth, some fell by the way side, and the birds of the air came and ate it up. And other some fell upon rocky ground, where it had not much earth, and it shot up immediately, because it had no depth of earth. And when

Luke viii. 4—8.

And when a very great multitude was gathered together, and hastened out of the cities unto Him, He spoke by a similitude.

The sower went out to sow his seed. And while he soweth, some fell by the way side, and it was trodden down, and the birds of the air, ate it up. And other some fell upon a rock, and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And other some



Matt. xiii 7—9.

they were scorched, and because they had not root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

And some fell upon good ground, and they brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, and some thirty fold. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark iv. 7—9.

the sun was risen, it was scorched, and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

And some fell upon good ground, and brought forth fruit that grew up, and increased, and yielded, one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred. And He said, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke viii. 8.

fell among thorns, and the thorns growing up with it, choked it.

And some fell upon good ground, and being sprung up, yielded fruit an hundred fold. Saying these things He cried out, He that hath ears to hear let him hear.

§ 59.—*The Parable of the Wheat and the Cockle.*

St. Matt. xiii. 10—17; 24—30.

And His disciples came and said to Him, Why speakest Thou to them in parables? Who answered and said to them, Because to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall abound, but he that hath not, from him shall be taken away that also which he hath. Therefore do I speak to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And the pro-

Matt. xiii. 15—17.

phesy of Isaias is fulfilled in them, who saith, 'By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive. For the heart of this people is grown gross, and with their ears they have been dull of hearing, and their eyes they have shut, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.'<sup>1</sup> But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. For, amen, I say to you, many prophets and just men have desired to see the things

<sup>1</sup> Isaias vi. 9, 10

Matt. xiii. 24—30.

that you see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things that you hear, and have not heard them.

Another parable he proposed to them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field. But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way. And when the blade was sprung up, and had brought forth fruit, then appeared also the cockle. And the servants of the good man of the house coming said to

him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? whence then hath it cockle? And he said to them, an enemy hath done this. And the servants said to him, Wilt thou that we go, and gather it up? And he said, No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it. Suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the cockle, and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn.

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§ 60.—*The Parables of the Seed, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven.*

Matt. xiii. 31—35.

Mark iv. 26—34.

And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the earth. And should sleep, and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring, and grow up whilst he knoweth not. For the earth of itself bringeth forth fruit, first the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear. And when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

Another parable He proposed unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Which is the least indeed of all seeds,

And He said, To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? or to what parable shall we compare it. It is as a grain of mustard seed, which when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the



Matt. xiii. 34, 35.

but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come, and dwell in the branches thereof.

Another parable He spoke to them, The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened.

All these things Jesus spoke in parables to the multitudes, and without parables He did not speak to them. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Mark iv. 33, 34.

seeds that are in the earth. And when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the birds of the air may dwell under the shadow thereof.

And with many such parables He spoke to them the word according as they were able to hear. And without parable He did not speak unto them; but apart, He explained all things to His disciples.

### § 61.—*Explanation of the Parable of the Sower.*

Matt. xiii. 18—23.

Mark iv. 10—25.

Luke viii. 9—18.

And when He was alone, the twelve that were with Him asked Him the parable. And He said to them, To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to them that are without, all things are done in parables. That seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not

And His disciples asked Him what this parable might be. To whom He said, To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to the rest in parables, that seeing they may not see, and hearing may not understand.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm lxxvii. 2.

Matt. xiii. 18—22.

Hear you therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, there cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart, this is he that received the seed by the way side.

And he that received the seed upon stony ground, this is he that heareth the word, and immediately receiveth it with joy. Yet hath he not root in himself, but it is only for a time, and when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the word, he is presently scandalized.

And he that re-  
ceived the seed

Mark iv. 13—18.

understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

And He saith to them, Are you ignorant of this parable? and how shall you know all parables?

He that soweth, soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown, and as soon as they have heard, immediately Satan cometh, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

And these likewise are they that are sown on the stony ground, who when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but are only for a time, and then when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the word, they are presently scandalized.

And others there  
are who are sown

Luke viii. 11—14.

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. And they by the way side are they that hear, then the devil cometh, and taketh the word out of their heart, lest believing they should be saved.

Now they upon the rock, are they who when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no roots, for they believe for a while, and in time of temptation, they fall away.

And that which  
fell among thorns



Matt. xiii. 23.

among thorns, is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choketh up the word, and it becometh fruitless.

But he that received the seed upon good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth, and beareth fruit, and yieldeth the one a hundredfold, and another sixty, and another thirty.

Mark iv. 19—24.

among thorns ; these are they that hear the word. And the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things, entering in choke the word, and it becometh fruitless.

And these are they who are sown upon the good ground, who hear the word, and receive it, and yield fruit, the one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.

And He said to them, Doth a candle come in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed ? and not to be set on a candlestick ? For there is nothing hid which shall not be made manifest, neither was it made secret, but that it may come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.

And He said to them, Take heed what you hear. In what measure you shall mete, it shall be measured to you again, and more shall be given to

Luke viii. 15, 18.

are they who have heard, and going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit.

But that on the good ground, are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.

Now no man lighting a candle covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it upon a candlestick, that they who come in may see the light. For there is not anything secret, that shall not be made manifest, nor hidden, that shall not be known, and come abroad.

Take heed therefore how you hear. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and who soever hath not, that also which he thinketh he hath,

Mark iv. 25

Luke viii. 18.

you. For he that shall be taken away  
hath, to him shall from him.  
be given, and he  
that hath not, that  
also which he hath  
shall be taken  
away from him.

§ 62.—*Explanation of the  
Parable of the Cockle. Three  
others added.*

Matt. xiii. 36—53.

Then having sent away the multitudes, He came into the house, and His disciples came to Him, saying, Expound to us the parable of the cockle of the field. Who made answer and said to them, He that soweth the good seed, is the Son of Man. And the field is the world. And the good seed are the children of the kingdom. And the cockle are the children of the wicked one. And the enemy that sowed them is the devil. But the harvest is the end of the world. And the reapers are the angels. Even as cockle therefore is gathered up, and burnt with fire, so shall it be at the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the just shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field, which a man hav-

Matt. xiii. 44—53.

ing found, hid it, and for joy thereof goeth, and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it. Again the kingdom of heaven is like to a net cast into the sea, and gathering together of all kind of fishes. Which, when it was filled, they drew out, and sitting by the shore, they chose out the good into vessels, but the bad they cast forth. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Have ye understood all these things? They say to Him, Yea. He said unto them, Therefore every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven, is like to a man that is a householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, He passed from thence.



§ 63.—*Our Lord stilling the storm.*

Matt. viii. 18—27.

And Jesus seeing great multitudes about Him, gave orders to pass over the water.

And a certain scribe came and said to Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go. And Jesus saith to him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. And another of His disciples said to Him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said to him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.

And when He entered into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves, but He was asleep. And they came to Him, and awaked Him, saying, Lord, save us, we perish. And Jesus saith to them, Why are you fearful, O ye of

Mark iv. 35—40.

And He said to them that day, when evening was come, Let us pass over to the other side.

And sending away the multitude, they take Him even as He was in the ship, and there were other ships with Him. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that the ship was filled. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, sleeping upon a pillow, and

Luke viii. 22—25.

And it came to pass on a certain day, that He went into a boat with His disciples, and He said to them, Let us go over to the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. And when they were sailing, He slept. And there came down a storm of wind upon the lake, and they were filled, and were in

Matt. viii. 26, 27.

little faith? Then rising up, He commanded the winds and the sea, and there came a great calm. But the men wondered, saying, What manner of man is this, for the winds and the sea obey Him?

Mark iv. 39, 40.

they awake Him, and say to Him, Master, doth it not concern Thee that we perish? And rising up, He rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was made a great calm. And He said to them, Why are you fearful? have you not faith yet? And they feared exceedingly, and they said one to another, Who is this (thinkest thou) that both wind and sea obey Him?

Luke viii. 24, 25.

danger. And they came and awaked Him, saying, Master, we perish. But He arising, rebuked the wind and the rage of the water, and it ceased, and there was a calm. And He said to them, Where is your faith? Who being afraid, wondered, saying one to another, Who is this, (think you) that He commandeth both the winds and the sea, and they obey Him?

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§ 64.—*The legion of devils.*

Matt. viii. 28—34; ix. 1.

And when He was come on the other side of the water, into the country of the Gerasenes, there met Him two that were possessed with devils, coming out of the sepulchres, exceeding fierce, so that none could pass by that way.

Mark v. 1—21.

And they came on the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. And as He went out of the ship, immediately there met Him out of the sepulchres a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling in the sepulchres, and no man now could bind him, not even with chains. For having been often bound with fetters

Luke viii. 26—40.

And they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is over against Galilee. And when He was come forth to the land, there met Him a certain man who had a devil now a very long time, and he wore no clothes, neither did he abide in a house, but in the sepulchres.



Matt. viii. 29.

And behold they cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee, Jesus Son of God? art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?

Mark v. 5—11.

and chains, he had burst the chains, and broken the fetters in pieces, and no one could tame him. And he was always day and night in the monuments and in the mountains, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

And seeing Jesus afar off, he ran and adored Him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus the Son of the most high God? I adjure Thee by God that Thou torment me not. For He said unto him, Go out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And He asked him, What is thy name? And he saith to Him, My name is Legion, for we are many.

And he besought Him much that He would not drive him away out of the country. And there was there

Luke viii. 28—32.

And when he saw Jesus, he fell down before Him, and crying out with a loud voice, he said, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I beseech Thee, do not torment me. For He commanded the unclean spirit to go out of the man. For many times it seized him, and he was bound with chains, and kept in fetters, and breaking the bonds he was driven by the devil into the deserts. And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? But he said, Legion, because many devils were entered into him.

And they besought Him that He would not command them to go into the abyss. And there was

Matt. viii. 30—34.

And there was, not far from them, an herd of many swine feeding. And the devils besought Him, saying, If Thou cast us out hence, send us into the herd of swine. And He said to them, Go. But they going out went into the swine, and behold the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and they perished in the waters.

And they that kept them fled, and coming into the city, told everything, and concerning them that had been possessed by the devils.

And behold, the whole city went out to meet Jesus, and when they saw Him, they besought Him that He would depart from their coasts.

Mark v. 12—17.

near the mountain a great herd of swine, feeding. And the spirits besought Him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And Jesus immediately gave them leave. And the unclean spirits going out, entered into the swine, and the herd with great violence was carried headlong into the sea, being about two thousand, and were stifled in the sea.

And they that fed them fled, and told it in the city and in the fields. And they went out to see what was done. And they came to Jesus, and they see him that was troubled with the devil, sitting, clothed, and right in his mind, and they were afraid. And they that had seen it, told them, in what manner he had been dealt with who had the devil, and concerning the swine. And they began to pray Him that He would depart from their coasts.

Luke viii. 33—37.

there a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain, and they besought Him that He would suffer them to enter into them. And He suffered them. The devils therefore went out of the man, and entered into the swine, and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and was stifled.

Which when they that fed them saw done, they fled, and told it in the city and in the villages. And they went out to see what was done, and they came to Jesus, and found the man out of whom the devils had departed, sitting at His feet clothed, and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And they also that had seen, told them how he had been healed from the legion. And all the multitude of the country of the Gerasenes besought Him to depart from them, for they were taken with great fear.



Matt. ix. 1.

Mark v. 18—21.

Luke viii. 38—40.

And when He went up into the ship, he that had been troubled with the devil, began to beseech Him that he might be with Him. And He admitted him not, but saith to him, Go into thy house to thy friends, and tell them how great thing the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had mercy on thee. And he went his way, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men wondered.

And He going up into the ship, returned back again.

Now the man out of whom the devils were departed, besought Him that he might be with Him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thy house, and tell how great things God hath done for thee. And he went through the whole city, publishing how great things Jesus had done for him.

And entering into a boat, He passed over the water, and came into His own city.

And when Jesus had passed again in the ship to the other side, a great multitude assembled together unto Him, and He was nigh unto the sea.

And it came to pass, that when Jesus was returned, the multitude received Him, for they were all waiting for Him.

§ 65.—*The disciples of St. John.*

Matt. ix. 14—17.

Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Thy disciples do not fast? And Jesus said to them, Can the children of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from

Matt. ix. 16, 17.

them, and then they shall fast. And nobody putteth a piece of raw cloth unto an old garment. For it taketh away the fulness thereof from the garment, and there is made a greater rent. Neither do they put new wine into old bottles. Otherwise the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish. But new wine they put into new bottles, and both are preserved.

§ 66.—*The daughter of Jairus and the woman with the issue of blood.*

Matt. ix. 18—26.

As He was speaking these things unto them, behold a certain ruler came and adored Him, saying, Lord, my daughter is even now dead, but come, lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus rising up followed him with His disciples.

And behold a woman who was troubled with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment.

For she said within herself, If I shall touch only His garment, I shall be healed.

Mark v. 22—43.

And there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue named Jairus, and seeing Him falleth down at His feet. And he besought Him much, saying: My daughter is at the point of death, come, lay Thy hand upon her, that she may be safe, and may live. And He went with him, and a great multitude followed Him, and they thronged Him.

And a woman who was under an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing the better, but rather worse, when she had heard of Jesus came in the crowd behind Him, and touched His garment. For she said, If I shall touch but His garment, I shall be healed. And forthwith the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she

Luke viii. 41—56.

And behold there came a man, whose name was Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue, and he fell down at the feet of Jesus, beseeching Him that He would come into his house, for he had an only daughter, almost twelve years old, and she was dying. And it happened, as He went, that He was thronged by the multitudes.

And there was a certain woman, having an issue of blood twelve years, who had bestowed all her substance on physicians, and could not be healed by any. She came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment, and immediately the issue of her blood stopped. And Jesus said, Who is it that touched Me? And all denying, Peter and they that were with Him said, Master, the multitudes throng and press Thee,



Matt. ix. 22.

But Jesus turning and seeing her, said, Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was healed from that hour.

Mark v. 30—36.

felt in her body that she was cured of the evil. And immediately Jesus knowing in Himself the virtue that had gone out from Him, turning to the multitude, said, Who hath touched My garments? And His disciples said to Him, Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou, Who hath touched Me? And He looked about to see her who had done this. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth. And He said to her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace, and be thou whole of thy disease.

While He was yet speaking, some come from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying, Thy daughter is dead, why dost thou trouble the Master any farther? But Jesus having heard the word that was spoken, saith to the

Luke viii. 46—50.

and dost Thou say, Who touched Me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched Me, for I know that virtue is gone out from Me. And the woman seeing that she was not hid, came trembling, and fell down before His feet, and declared before all the people for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was immediately cured. But He said to her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole, go thy way in peace.

As He was yet speaking, there cometh one to the ruler of the synagogue, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead, trouble Him not. And Jesus hearing this word, answered the father of the maid, Fear not, believe

Matt. ix. 23—26.

And when Jesus was come into the house of the ruler, and saw the minstrels and the multitude making a rout, He said, Give place, for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. And when the multitude was put forth, He went in and took her by the hand. And the maid arose.

And the fame hereof went abroad into all that country.

Mark v. 37—43.

ruler of the synagogue. Fear not, only believe.

And He admitted not any man to follow Him, but Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And they come to the house of the ruler of the synagogue; and He seeth a tumult, and people weeping and wailing much. And going in, He saith to them, Why make this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. But He having put them all out, taketh the father and the mother of the damsel; and them that were with Him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And taking the damsel by the hand, He saith to her, Talitha cumi, which is, being interpreted, Damsel (I say to thee) arise. And immediately the damsel rose up, and walked; and she was twelve years old.

And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And He

Luke viii. 51—56.

only, and she shall be safe.

And when He was come to the house, He suffered not any man to go in with Him, but Peter, and James, and John, and the father and mother of the maiden, And all wept and mourned for her. But He said, Weep not, the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. But He taking her by the hand, cried out, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit returned, and she arose immediately.

And He bid them give her to eat. And her parents were astonished,



Matt.

Mark v. 43.

Luke viii. 56.

<p>charged them strictly that no man should know it, and commanded that something should be given her to eat.</p>	<p>whom He charged to tell no man what was done.</p>	
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§ 67.—*Healing of two blind men, and one dumb.*

Matt. ix. 27—34.

And as Jesus passed from thence, there followed Him two blind men crying out and saying, Have mercy on us, O Son of David. And when He was come to the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus saith to them, Do you believe that I can do this unto you? They say to Him, Yea, Lord. Then He touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it done unto you. And their eyes were opened, and

Matt. ix. 31—34.

Jesus strictly charged them, saying, See that no man know this.

But they going out, spread His fame abroad in all that country. And when they were gone out, behold they brought Him a dumb man, possessed with a devil. And after the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke, and the multitudes wondered, saying, Never was the like seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, By the prince of devils He casteth out devils.





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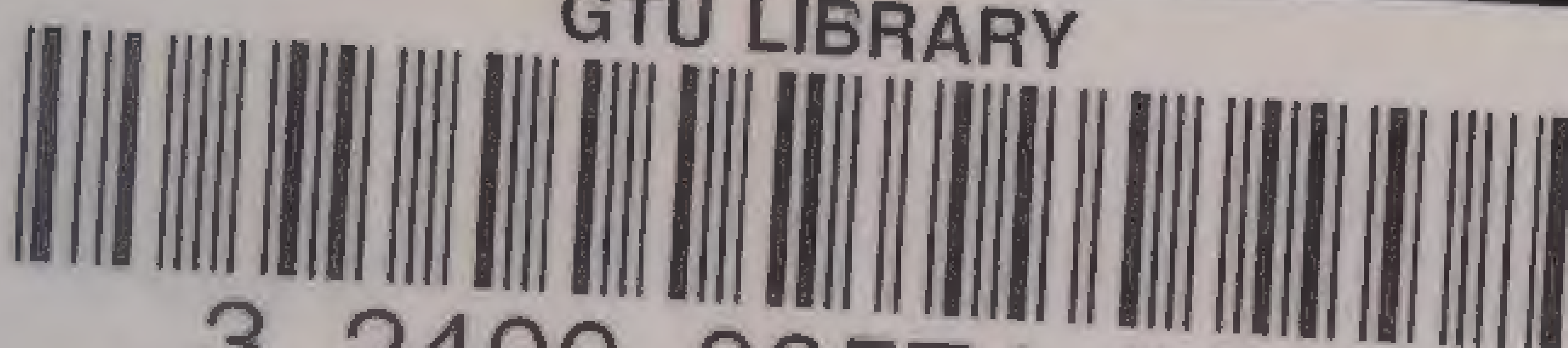
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